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### **New York Times Misses The Debate**

The Times's coverage of Mr. Obama's performance in the first debate, which supporters and opponents alike have characterized as ill-prepared or lackluster, and which he in his Denver speech and his staff sought to excuse as the surprising persona of Mr. Romney, misses a central point.

Focusing not on which candidate, if either, I may prefer, but on Mr. Obama's personality traits, I find the debate revelatory: Mr. Obama cannot take criticism; he surrounds himself with staff designed to bolster a weak ego-structure; his vigorous nodding in the debate indicated not so much sulking as it did a deflation, a drawing inward; he is not used to going man-on-man with another, as was the case with Mr. Romney. If I am correct, several questions arise. Why the closing down within himself, his intolerance toward personal criticism, his thin-skinnedness – all in contrast to Mr. Romney's evident comfort in feeling at one with himself, directness, looking Mr. Obama in the eye?

I mentioned weak ego-structure, itself taking greater significance by the way Mr. Obama has thrown the cloak of the state secrets doctrine around his government and employed the Espionage Act against whistleblowers. Transparency in government is at a new low. Defensive walls, personal and structural, have been erected, and on the former, which concerns us here, explanation has to lie in family circumstances and Mr. Obama's clear difficulties in relating to authority.

More than any president, Republican or Democrat, perhaps throughout American history, Mr. Obama gravitates to men of power and, equally significant, thrives on becoming immersed in the trappings of power. Harding, Hoover, Reagan, Bush Two, have all enjoyed closeness with business leaders, yet none via ambiguous psychological attachments. Obama has not been so fortunate. And what passes for bipartisanship in the political realm and accommodation in the economic is the steady need for reassurance, of being praised and even liked. Mr. Romney had a more supportive upbringing.

These traits do not necessarily have a one-to-one correspondence with ideology. Human personality is not politically coded; those with solidary family ties may become social Darwinists, those poorly resolving intrafamilial ties may be highly compassionate. But in Mr. Obama's case it is imperative that, absent Axelrod's manipulations and Rhodes's crafting of liberal rhetoric, we see the man removed from the artificial pedestal on which he has been placed in order to evaluate his record dispassionately. This is hardly a plea for Mr. Romney's election, but it is to say that because to his base Mr. Obama can do no wrong, his policies, such as on banking regulation and job creation, may have discrepancies equal to or greater than those charged to his opponent.

At least in Mr. Romney, you get what you see—and one is then free to make a determination.

OCTOBER 12, 2012

### **America on the Cusp of Fascism**

I use "fascism" here not as a cliché, but as an historical-structural formation principally rooted in the mature stage of capitalism, in which business-government interpenetration (what the Japanese political scientist Masao Maryuma called the "close-embrace" system) has created hierarchical

social classes of wide differences in wealth and power, the militarization of social values and geopolitical strategy, and a faux ideology of classlessness to instill loyalty for the social order among working people. In fact, each of these factors is already present to a high degree in America—superbly disguised however by the rhetoric of liberalism, as in Mr. Obama’s presidency.

This said, my provocative hypothesis (only slightly tongue-in-cheek) is that in the coming election Romney is preferable to Obama. Why? In broad terms, we see varying degrees of sophistication in the mad dash across the finish line (i.e., fascism proper, midway between nascent and full-blown), with Romney and Republicans representing plebeian fascism, and Obama and Democrats a sophisticated corporatist form. Everything charged against Romney may be true, from Social Darwinist beliefs and gut-militarism to cultural intolerance and xenophobia, and perhaps even more so for the party as a whole, though that is a moot point—an overt negation, on all grounds, of what we mean by democracy. (Not that America has honored or achieved that state of political-economic development through most of its history!) To pursue the candidacy of Romney involves one in a societal nightmare of unrestrained wealth (and the perks that go with it, from horribly skewed taxation policy to categorical setbacks to unions, wage rates, and an antilabor climate) and severe cuts in the social safety net. All this is known, predictable, transparent—part of my argument for viewing Romney as preferable to Obama. Clearly, Trotsky in popularized form is in the back of my mind.

By contrast, Obama is unassailable, enjoying the protective cloak of the state secrets doctrine (which, also as the National Security State, he invokes constantly), the liberal glossing on all policy matters, thanks to the extremely able spinmeisters Axelrod and Rhodes, and an adoring, submissive, uncritical base, in deep denial and for whatever reasons unwilling to examine the administration’s record. That record confirms the long-term political, economic, and moral bankruptcy of the Democratic party, whose differentiating character setting it apart from the Republicans lies in the magnitude of skilled evasion and/or deception surrounding policies which themselves replicate the central elements in those of their opponents.

Republicans sincerely criticize Obama because they are too ignorant to recognize, in their rush to antigovernment rhetoric, that he takes the same position as they smoothed out to please a base at best composed of pretend-radicalism and, equally, to ward off criticism from those who desperately want to believe his earlier promises. This comes down to political theater at its cruelest.

The list of actual betrayal is long and virtually covering his public policy without exception. (A good start can be found in the critical essays in *Hopeless*, a true icebreaker for the uninformed prepared to listen.) Let me select several obvious examples. 1) Health care, in which Obama savaged the single-payer system, thus preparing the way for the same on the public option, meanwhile silencing, or rather, delegitimizing all dissident voices, at the same time as exempting health insurers from antitrust prosecution and favoring Big Pharma; 2) Civil liberties, a good litmus test of democratic governance, in which Obama’s Department of Justice argued against granting habeas corpus rights to detainees, invoked the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, carried surveillance beyond that of previous administrations, with the National Security Agency one of the culprits practicing the black magic of eavesdropping, while renditions and “black holes” continue and even agencies like FDA spy on its employees; 3) militarism, from which foreign policy, including trade policy, cannot be excluded, in which the drone—as Obama’s signature weapon—terrorizes whole populations reeking destruction from the skies, naval power displayed from the

South China Sea to the Mediterranean, a whole new generation of nuclear weapons in the pipeline (exempt from potential budgetary sequestration), a military budget itself second to none, and what appears to be a permanent state of war; 4) the omissions, which by their absence speak volumes about the purposes and policies of his administration, in which job creation and foreclosures have not been addressed, climate change, wholly disappeared, gun control, nonexistent, poverty never, never mentioned, and business and banking regulation the compounding of phoniness on phoniness, not unexpected considering Obama's belief in deregulation and bringing in the Clinton-Rubin crowd of free marketeers.

How much more or worse damage can Romney and the Republicans do? They might fuss about same-sex marriage and contraception, while Obama, in his Pacific-first geopolitical vision and concrete strategy, wants to encircle China, and press for an economic agenda promoting further corporate-wealth concentration.

If Republicans come across as Taliban on cultural issues, Democrats almost surreptitiously advance the financialization of the total economy, with the consequent distortions introduced—loss of manufacturing, increasing wealth concentration, and capitalism's Achilles heel, underconsumption. Why Romney? Because his transparency as a Neanderthal may, just may, bring people into the streets, while under Obama passivity and false consciousness appear almost irreversible. I for one will stay home. The lesser-of-two-evils argument is morally obtuse, and dangerous, the first, because it means complicity with policies ultimately destructive, the second, because it induces an undeserved self-righteousness which next time around would yield further compromise. If the people are gulled and lulled into the acceptance of mock-democracy, courtesy of Goldman Sachs and waterboarding apologist Brennan, with Obama presiding over the bread-and-circuses routine, heaven help us.

OCTOBER 16, 2012

### **Obama and His Silent Base**

During the Great Depression, America was a different nation. We were drawn together as a people, even or especially in extreme hardship. Class was a salient term, one to build on, not an object of ridicule subject to obfuscation. We accepted responsibility for one another, solidified in a view of social obligation centered on government as the people's instrument for achieving the public interest. We were not stampeded and frightened away, either by a cultural atmosphere of heightened individualism or organized campaigns by corporations and right-wing ideologues for privatization and trickle-down economics. The refrain, "Brother, can you spare a dime?", in the early days of gathering conviction and will, emphasized the first word—brother. Had I been of age (I was born in 1933—and did not think of myself as a radical until 14-15, with the Cold War and the campaign of Henry Wallace in '48), I would have been proud to be an American during the New Deal, where public values, public institutions, and *public works* as the means for job creation and to address underconsumption came to the foreground.

Leadership matters. Through his speeches, his fireside chats, his example in fighting polio (he would never again walk unaided, heavy braces, leaning on his son's arm, giving the illusion of walking), his warmth, unflappable demeanor, and, yes, charm, Franklin Roosevelt established a bond with his supporters which mutually strengthened both. A positive dialectic: the interplay of

political nourishment, strengthening resolve for each leading the other forward, so that FDR—a conservative at heart, but conservative in ways not understood today—could venture far afield from conventional economics and, partly in response, partly nudging him still further, his supporters, a large majority of the American people, could and did lift their own horizons, did indeed perhaps for the first time in American history grasp the full meaning, without apology, of *entitlement* as a basic human right.

This dialectic, or interplay, fortifying the conviction, dignity, and resolve of both, was based on the foundation of societal reconstruction: tangible achievement in what today we call infrastructure, but even more, in the realm of the human spirit, not as an ethereal concept, because food on the table also mattered. To be sure, the outer limits of the New Deal remained capitalistic (i.e., to save capitalism), and there should be no illusion about NRA (National Recovery Administration), which, under Hugh Johnson, promoted the concentration of industry. Nonetheless, the other side of the ledger, much of which was quasi-socialist in nature, or when not, still affirming the primacy of human over property rights, was a veritable alphabet soup of ingenuity and creativity (pragmatism, not as later usage would have it, to forestall basic change, but to uncover further needs and solutions).

WPA, PWA, CCC, these three alone suffice to constitute a silent revolution when measured against three centuries of American political culture. Even poets' workshops, leaf-raking, federal theater projects, bring tears to my eyes because of the nourishment they gave to those who participated and those whom they reached. America was affirming itself and its people. Odets: "Awake and Sing." There was of course more: the Wagner Act, Social Security, banking and securities legislation, the fundamentals of a social capitalism only partially realized and perhaps an oxymoron in the world to follow. This was not Roosevelt's doing alone, as though creating a new society from whole cloth, but depended as much if not more on a people responding to the opportunity he provided for self-organization (as in the Wagner Act) and pressuring him leftward because they were mobilizing for concerted action after decades of repression or indifference. FDR removed the cobwebs; the dialectic was consummated in the people's own assertion of rights for a decent competence, presented to receptive ears. When the "economic royalists" of the period made known their hatred of him, he responded, "...and I welcome their hate."

Long ago (actually not) and far away, as measured in the steadily rightward shift of America itself, a chief casualty of this development has been the Democratic party, which at each step became an accomplice in what I might term the fascisization of the society at large, including the body politic. America is not fascist...yet, but as both a structural and a social process the trend line seems to me clear. Fascism does not require the concentration camp, persecution, torture—although their threat and potential remain present always, ready to be invoked and remaining discretely under the surface. Rather, fascism can be apprehended through a number of indices: e.g., extreme wealth concentration; the partnership of business and government, itself to promote monopoly capital, prevent union organization and labor militancy, and create a strong State predicated on military power and trade supremacy; and a compliant (and complacent) populace which is deferential to power and wealth, tied in ideological knots through false consciousness, and intellectually broken down through media, propaganda, and signals from above.

Enter, therefore, the Obama administration, a mirror image of FDR and the New Deal *in reverse*. We expect reactionary ideology and politics from Nixon, Reagan, Bush I, and Bush II, but surely

not the Democrats, first Clinton, and now, more spectacularly, Obama. Clinton does not concern me here; he is probably the most overrated Democrat ever. He has repositioned the American economy—more systematically than his Republican predecessors—on the axis of *deregulation*, so thoroughly as to cripple any possibility of effective regulation of business and banking in the public interest and, with destroying Glass-Steagall, to pave the way for the financial debacle of 2007. Clinton gave market fundamentalism a folksy vibe, while the administration, from Robert Rubin down, provided corporate America a bountiful feast and shifted the direction of the economic system to finance, widening its reach, at manufacturing's expense, to international channels and in the concoction of exotic, highly profitable, investment vehicles. Here the dialectic between leader and followers turns decidedly negative. With each movement and maneuver away from the people, the people applauded more; Clinton basked in their adulation, nerving him to still greater efforts on behalf of the business community, from trade pacts to personal tributes.

One cannot understand Obama without Clinton—as, not merely background, but a straight line projection, in which Obama took over much of the Clinton team and all of the free-market ideology focused specifically as the starting point on deregulation. This was not known to Obama's base, his fervent supporters in the 2008 campaign (for whom I was one—one who participated in the civil-rights struggle in the late 50s and through the 60s, now elated at the election of a black president who talked the language of social justice). I was from practically Day One quickly disabused—with the appointment of Geithner and Summers. As the rhetoric soared, the policies plummeted. Few saw this happening as it occurred, and his base remains in a state of profound denial, giving false consciousness an exponential boost that neither Marx nor Marcuse could perhaps imagine. The Nobel Prize for Peace for waging war. The New START treaty on nuclear weapons reduction for actually ordering a new round of weapons development under the euphemism of modernization. A constitutional law teaching position, for perhaps the greatest setback to civil liberties since the Palmer Raids: the list is long, such as surveillance, made possible through advanced technology, as in the National Security Administration usage; reliance on the state-secrets doctrine to hide potential war crimes and place government completely out of reach as the National Security State; denial of the right of habeas corpus to detainees, and relatedly, the despicable doctrine of indefinite detention; employment of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, thereby stifling dissent and criticism where and when they are most needed; and, under civil liberties, I would insist on including the *drone attacks*, in which the targets for assassination (personally authorized by Obama) are hardly given the right of counsel, a fair trial, or even proper identification. How his base can condone the drone, making them complicit in its hideous use, speaks volumes about the moral bankruptcy of modern liberalism.

Cornel West is wrong, I think. Obama is not the “black mascot of Wall Street,” but something far worse—not a symbolic figure to bring the Street good luck, but a heart-and-soul activist, or what we once called “a true believer,” who consciously tailors policies to the interests of upper economic groups—frequently through omission, the absence of genuine banking regulation, as well as commission, as in favoritism to the oil companies, nuclear power industry, defense contractors (already an unmistakable record of assistance to key sectors sufficient to validate capitalism as so top heavy that the tipping point to fascism is within reach or has been reached). This active strengthening of capitalism has its clear military and international-economic components. We are verily a Garrison State. Obama's foreign policy would make another National Security Democrat's mouth water: Dean Acheson. Obama is the next in a long line of Democrats anxious to burnish

anticommunist credentials, under whatever name the current enemy may be labeled, a party mistakenly thinking itself and viewed by others as to the Left and for that reason wanting to prove to the world its superpatriotism, manifested largely in military prowess and huge defense budgets. Naval power, as in the Mediterranean and the South China Sea, is “in,” as is support of dictators (Honduras) and opposition to popular governments (Venezuela) in seeking to remain dominant in Latin America. Most Important, Obama is positioning foreign policy, his Pacific-first strategy, with respect to the encirclement and/or containment of China.

To all of the foregoing, his base is silent as the tomb. In contrast to the New Deal, there is very little opposition in the street. The Flint Sit-down strike of 1937 might as well have been at the time of the Roman Empire. The ACLU, despite its good intentions, has not taken on Obama and DOJ. The Occupy Movement in what seems to me its nebulous posture has not confronted Obama directly and by name. In other words, the negative dialectic is alive and well, each Obama betrayal met by like passivity in the base, thus giving him reason to think he can get away with more. At the moment, he might be right.

OCTOBER 25, 2012

### **The Moral Case for Silence**

Herman Melville’s story, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” written 160-odd years ago, is now more relevant than ever. Bartleby faces out to a blank wall—the subtitle is, “A Story of Wall Street”—his highest assertion of self being: “I prefer not to.” Melville, perhaps America’s greatest writer, was making an important statement: meaningful choice has been circumscribed, even by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, in American society. Not only was the heroic turned against itself, but a pervasive condition of alienation defined the individual’s inner life and relations to others. One encountered reality through basic compromises of the ideal vision of a democratic polity, so that engagement became complicity in the renewal of one’s alienation. This, Melville resolutely opposed.

So, too, did Sherwood Anderson seventy years later. (By coincidence, today the *New York Times* focuses on Elyria, Ohio, his birthplace and the locale for *Winesburg*, which remains essentially unchanged.) Anderson also captures the loneliness and sadness of American life, which finds the individual enclosed within walls, so that one’s highest affirmation becomes to say “No” to the materialism that trades in false values and destroys the human soul. From Melville to Anderson to the present, America is still in the same condition, only now in more intensified form in that we no longer recognize alienation and willingly accept complicity in a life devoid of self-knowledge and the cooperative social bonds which alone confers dignity on human beings.

Making the moral case for silence as imperative in the coming election may seem difficult. Liberals and many but not all progressives regard the choice to be crystal-clear: Romney, the Republican party, and the Tea Partiers in its midst represent retrograde social forces affecting all sectors of American life. The indictment is merited. Romney seeks a return to the Dark Ages of American capitalism. Both regulation and the social safety net would be severely impaired, and individual privacy would be invaded by a heightened puritanical zeal. Hester Prynne would lurk in every shadow. As for foreign policy, bluntness would rule the waves. One suspects that the Pentagon would be given a blank check to wage perpetual war founded on the belief that America, a

pristine land of freedom, is surrounded by enemies, domestic and foreign. From the liberals' standpoint, what could possibly be worse?

I submit, perhaps Barack Obama could be worse. It is not that he fails to transcend the Dark Ages of American capitalism and its rapacious behaviors, but rather, that he *has*, in ways that speak to a sophisticated corporatism which already has created societal foundations detrimental to America's root democratic professions of freedom and human rights (themselves relegated for the most part to the mythology of exceptionalism). Obama, more than his predecessors, is the quintessential spokesperson for a mature capitalism in which government, as custodian of the *public* interest, is under assault from the forces of privatization, now gathering as a tidal wave which he is blithely surfing. The leader of government presides over its transformation into an annex of Wall Street. Really, a transmutation, both of government and society, knit together in callous disregard for both economic and ethical constraints on greed, extremes in the distribution of wealth, and the widespread privation created by a political economy of market idolatry and financial chicanery.

Alienation had been classically described as the pain and anguish experienced through feelings of estrangement from one's society—but at least the pain was felt, and therefore could be contested even when the source was unclear. One was not reduced to apathy or passivity. In that meaning, alienation was akin to the recognition although somewhat blurred of exploitation, in which case the idea of resistance had not been removed from consciousness. Today under mature capitalism social structure and cultural institutions are directed to the obliteration of political consciousness. Resistance to the actuality of hunger, homelessness, unemployment, home foreclosures, accelerated inequality of income and wealth, vast military outlays, all of which speak volumes about the decay of a democratic order, is less than conditions warrant and almost nonexistent. This is alienation in its more modern phase: exploitation is very much present, its recognition conversely is at a low ebb. Obama dances over a spiritual void, characterized by the inertia of once progressive social forces, whether labor unions, civil liberties and civil rights groups, or the mobilization of the poor themselves, as in councils of the unemployed at the advent of the Great Depression.

This form of alienation is the more insidious because, not merely inhering in the massification and depersonalization of the social order as described by Kafka, it has been actively sought via the political system by the power structure to ensure dominance above and acquiescence below—the “below” here referring to working people en masse (fully three-fourths of society) and those dissidents of all stripes who may still have their wits about them. The behavior of upper groups, while base and cruel, is not groundless or irrational. To have millions out of work, many of whom are no longer defined even as included in the labor force because of long-term unemployment, others while barely holding on facing demoralization, ill health, and disintegration of family ties, and youth, without prospects, becoming a lost generation more poignantly depressed than their counterpart of the 1920s, all of these represent a *potential* tinder box for, if not social revolt, then, almost equally to be feared, destabilization of the market society and economy. The poor can only be hidden, ignored, or forgotten up to a point, when the phrase “middle class” as an inclusive social diagram loses its celebratory aura. For mature capitalism to achieve optimal functionality, i.e., the generation of sustained profits to a small, increasingly cohesive elite, or ruling group, requires strong—or at least presenting the illusion of strength—co-optative leadership capable of absorbing the negative energies it produces.



In this regard, Obama is the ideal personification of mature capitalism. He is not a front man, cipher, or puppet; instead, he identifies fully with the social order, its hierarchical structure, and its social purposes. He needed no urgings from others to betray practically every campaign promise he made in 2008. Today, he is hardly the alternative to Romney, his record reducing him to the same plane as his opponent. For ruling groups, his advantage lies in his facility for dressing retrograde policies in liberal rhetoric, and more, keeping intact an electoral base in the depths of false consciousness who cannot, in denial, see how their interests, including that of the black community itself, have been violated. Broadly, he and Romney are committed to the Washington Consensus, its faith in market efficiency, rationality, and justness, which provides the ideological cornerstone for deregulation of the economy and, relatedly, the subordination of government to, while servicing the needs of, business.

Even here, one can debate who has the better argument, Romney emphasizing a stronger manufacturing presence, Obama—signaling the new—looking toward the financialization of the total economy. Yet neither one's position detracts from further wealth concentration and an hierarchical system of power. By deeming finance modern, the wave of the future in economic growth, Obama in practice devalues manufacturing as perhaps premodern (a distinction fueled by his rhetorical liberalism). This shift in proportions of the economic base, especially in the context of globalization, where industrialization becomes widespread, *intentionally* offers a structural vehicle for greater if riskier profitability through the financial sector. A New American Exceptionalism is informally declared, banking as the ascendant force in achieving national and global prosperity. The hitch of course is that this has led to some of the shadiest practices in the history of American capitalism: predatory lending, credit default swaps, derivatives trading, exotic instruments having utmost ingenuity, all carrying the message, risk analysis be damned, as full speed ahead to enormous profits.

As a result, much of the global financial community was brought to its knees, a disaster in the making for some time, but most acutely felt not by bankers and fund managers but those whose equity was destroyed in the housing debacle and the poor and the unemployed who faced reductions in social services and benefits. Social misery, however, did not run parallel with enlightenment. Obama's supporters either forget or do not wish to be reminded that among his first appointments were Geithner and Summers, who represented a straight line projection—and for that reason were chosen—from the Clinton administration of the framework of deregulation. The essence of Clintonian economics, under Robert Rubin's tutelage, deregulation, primarily through the repeal of Glass-Steagall, laid the basis for the financial crisis of 2007.

The absence of effective financial regulation, true to this day, as seen in the feckless operations of the SEC, is only one dimension of basic agreement between the candidates. Others include such diverse areas (yet forming a unitary perspective of conservatism if not reaction) as gun control, climate change, oil drilling, the inclusion of coal mining in the energy mix, and despite nuances, immigration policy, and, although Romney is mum on the subject, their common disregard for civil liberties, justified as necessary by the threat of terrorism. On the last-named, it would be difficult for Romney to exceed or match Obama's record in erecting the state secrets doctrine as a first principle of governance, leading to the creation of the National Security State, use of the Espionage Act to discourage whistleblowers, widespread surveillance, the practice of rendition, assault on

habeas corpus rights, and, not to be forgotten, approval of indefinite detention—a new outburst equal to the Palmer Raids and McCarthyism in undermining the Constitution.

Withal, Obama appears untouchable; his genius for manipulating the American public, or rather, his base, including the many in distress, is critical to his leadership role in advancing American financial and business interests. The base, resting in adulatory mode, refuses to recognize potential long-term trends that have now been set in motion, e.g., further deregulation or that which proves inefficacious (as witness FDA and Interior Department policies), privatization, and weakening of the social safety net. In symbolic terms, the drone may well define the Obama presidency. One does not know whether Romney would closet himself with his advisors and personally authorize targeted assassination. Hopefully not, given that this barbaric act is the antithesis of due process and rule of law—a leap into moral vacuity that he would find difficult to match or surpass.

Finally, in the foreign policy arena, Obama, Republican distortions of the record notwithstanding, has been anything but a dove (aka, weak, soft, red), and instead he has been a robust commander-in-chief who surrounds himself with a highly aggressive national security team asserting a geopolitical agenda entirely establishment-oriented and, hence, consistent with the main outlines of previous administrations. Obama is no patsy. He enlarged the mission of the CIA to include operations, enjoys cordial relations with the intelligence community, has awakened to the imperial possibilities of naval power, has, through assistance to the nuclear power industry, moved forward a new generation of nuclear weapons, assisted paramilitary groups in Columbia in conducting death-squad operations against labor organizers and peasants whose land stands in the way of mineral companies, all this in addition to the larger picture, what is quaintly termed the “re-positioning” of American interest and military forces. The Cold War is being refurbished with what appears to be a new enemy—China. Obama’s Pacific-first strategy can only signify its attempted encirclement, accompanied by the strengthening of alliance systems including reportedly the pressure on Japan to rearm and to embark on the development of nuclear weapons. And securing favorable trade-and-investment outlets globally, as in the past, has not been neglected.

Like I believe Bartleby would hold, affirming silence becomes necessary when, as in the coming election, but also, the wider historical path being pursued, one regards as morally debasing not only a lesser-of-two-evils argument but what stands behind it: willing complicity in the political and cultural mechanisms used to promote exploitation and inequality, societal conditions rooted in hierarchical relations of power having direct economic consequences for every member of society. Inequality is a cancer. Its spread depends on false consciousness, its treatment and cure on self-knowledge and resistance to policies and practices in the name of, but intended to deceive, the people and deprive them of their rights. My hope is slight, however just perhaps to say “No” strikes a responsive chord, makes for a collective response, becomes socially popular, the sky may not fall in, but false consciousness would be if not sloughed off at least seriously weakened. And, in turn, the structure of power, in its brutality affecting human dignity, would be exposed for all to see—and ultimately oppose. The chance to project an authentic alternative vision, one no longer beholden to wealth accumulation and its correlates social misery and division, is worth taking. These are not propitious times for democracy; first must come an awareness of that in order to rekindle the hope in its realization.

DECEMBER 21, 2012

### **The Conviction Gap**

“I don’t think I’ve been on vacation.”

No, Obama, you have been too busy servicing corporate wealth and major banking interests—as well as keeping the US embroiled in war, intervention, and your signature, armed drones for targeted assassination.

How can we expect you to feel sorrow for the deaths of children at home, when you personally through your authorization inflict death on children abroad?

The world has your number, if America doesn’t. There will be no substantial and substantive gun control in your tenure. By echoing Republican themes of mental health, you will sidetrack DIRECT attacks on the issue of gun control.

Shed no more crocodile tears, and please don’t be irritated, as the article points out, when your four years of INACTION are brought up. If you can’t take criticism, and enough has been written to know that you CANNOT, it’s time to stop the fakery and begin to lead America in a small “d” democratic direction. You claim having been busy. True, all on the wrong side of issues concerning peace and justice.

Perhaps if you take up gun control, I mean, not give off pious platitudes, but get down to business, then maybe that would give you a taste for why you were elected, and perhaps then you will also address climate change, oil drilling, civil liberties, job creation, mortgage foreclosures, and a host of things from which you have run away. Get real, scrap the teleprompter, Axelrod, and Rhodes, and say something that shows conviction.

JANUARY 3, 2013

### **The Education of a (Sometime) Radical**

*This is the first entry, combining autobiography and social protest, for me quite inseparable, from my “prolegomenous remarks” for a book I am writing, ‘Eichmann on the Potomac: Bureaucratization of Targeted Assassination.’ I hope that the experiences described here will resonate with those of my generation, and provide some insight to all CounterPunch readers about the necessity—which I’m sure they already feel—for critical scrutiny of, and strong opposition to, the Obama administration and what I believe it represents, intensifies, and seeks permanently to legitimize, the militarization of capitalism in America. The second of three entries in this section is entitled, “In Memory of Schwerner-Cheney-Goodman,” and might best be thought, from the present base, a comparison of Obama with the truly courageous activists in the civil-rights struggle: Obama, an Imposter. The book itself will record the vile, illegal, immoral character of drone warfare, the parameters of which must be laid squarely at his door. — NP*

I have occupied approximately the same place on the political-ideological spectrum since 1945 (perhaps not an especially proud aspect of my growth, or lack thereof, to admit), somewhere between authentic radical and radical *manque*, the former to indicate everything from a deepening awareness of political philosophy and economic theory, to the usual activities—walking picket

lines, delivering speeches, engaging in endless discussions, marching in demonstrations, some messy, most peaceful—and the latter, at different stages of life, acting the poseur, talking outside the range of my knowledge and experience, assigning myself an inflated role in leading the charge (as in a university strike in Spring 1970 protesting Kent State and the mining of Haiphong Harbor, forgetting the 10,000 who stood behind me). Why 1945? At age twelve I was entering the second year of confinement to bed because of a (to my satisfaction, undiagnosed) spinal ailment, even though under the charge of Dr. Leo Mayer, probably the most widely respected orthopedist in the US, and—from my reading, friend to Isaac Stern—the first, in full body armor, the second, without the cast, but still flat on my back. Yet, why 1945? I wasted those years. Instead of studying Greek and Latin with a tutor, I brooded, somewhat precociously, about the fate of the world, identified with anti-fascism (though my parents were nonpolitical), and revered, yes, not too strong a word, Franklin Roosevelt, less for his policies than for his having survived and adjusted to poliomyelitis. Nine years later I embarked on graduate studies with my mentor, Frank Freidel, still the finest scholar of FDR, first at Stanford, then at Harvard. When at thirteen I began the arduous process of learning to walk again (by 14 or 15 I was playing 36 holes of golf, under some difficulty), it seemed to me so natural to *identify* with all underdogs, the poor, Negroes—at the time, a word of honor, as used with pride by my hero, Paul Robeson, and by my later hero, Dr. King, as in his famous March on Washington address, which I attended—migrant workers, janitors, the occasional homeless I would meet, a process of identification not unlike my feelings about FDR, who I later learned never again walked unaided, instead leaning on the arm of one of his sons and, in excruciating pain, giving the illusion of walking. Again later, my feeling for and about him only deepened when I learned that at his death (which, listening helplessly to the radio beside my bed, I vividly remember), despite the blackout still in effect on Long Island Sound, the lights burned brightly on the estates that night at parties celebrating his passing. I still cherish his words, roughly paraphrased, about how the economic royalists passionately hated him, his reply being, “And I welcome their hatred.”

Emotionally, politically, I could never forgive the rich their ignorance and folly—at least, certain rich, for I was frankly conflicted in that I admired FDR’s own patrician spirit because it contributed to a certain selflessness, which meant simply, he was not on the take, his ambition could be channeled into public service, there were no revolving doors. This was admittedly rare; put crudely, there were an exceptional few who could skip over or around the *rat race* and find within themselves the wherewithal to achieve greatness or distinction, or better yet, be themselves, from which it could be possible to discover latent energies translating into exemplary conduct and values, much like adherence to a personal code of honor. In politics, I trust such a man. Once in California, while at Stanford, I followed Adlai Stevenson in the 1956 Democratic primary for three days of grueling campaigning, saw him near exhaustion, and on the final day, standing on the railroad tracks trailed by a few reporters and supporters, he gave sublime expression to a social vision free from the usual cant of politicians. That stuck, for I have seldom since found anyone in politics, in either party, including most emphatically, John F. Kennedy, who possessed the genuineness to take the reigns of leadership. Wealth was no guarantee of goodness, nor certainly was high office (as Lord Acton readily predicted).

Henry Agard Wallace was another exception, whom, as a 15-year old, I worked hard to elect in 1948, as the Progressive Party’s presidential candidate. A dozen years later, having already done research at Hyde Park, and having found that he was an early riser, I sought him out at the Harvard

Guest House one Sunday morning at 6 a.m., after his address the night before at the Ford Hall Forum. There he was, as usual prepared for visitors, black suit, shock of greying hair, sitting on the sofa in the visitors lounge, and after intense conversation, we had a heaping pancake breakfast, by which time I realized he was quite like no other, having an extraordinarily capacious mind, already evident from his Forum presentation on the relations between Russia and China. This was 1960, and he was far ahead of the intellectual curve. I mentioned my interest in writing his biography, and he invited Nancy and I to his home in South Salem, formerly the John G. Winant estate, which he had converted into a working farm to continue with his hybridization experiments (as I recall, strawberries)—assisted by a farmhand, Ph.D., Minnesota. Though we agreed on the biography (he ran up and down the stairs with batches destined for the Columbia Oral History Project, because I challenged him on the 1935-36 purge in the Dept. of Agriculture, of which he was Secretary) I realized to my *shame* later, and even on the spot, that given his strong scientific spine, e.g., the first one in America to offer, at Iowa State, courses in mathematical statistics, I was over my head and could not do justice to his multifaceted life and career. I dropped out, fearing lack of adequate preparation. To my sorrow because of the intrinsic value of such a study, but now for another reason as well. I place little stock in becoming involved in the vogueish alternative history, but the question, what if FDR had not replaced Wallace with Harry Truman, is nonetheless intriguing. For, still as vice-president, he would have ascended to the presidency in 1945 upon Roosevelt's death and could possibly have made a difference in the history of the Cold War, either mitigating its severity or, by seeking a reduction in tensions and pressing for greater mutual trade (as he in fact did as Secretary of Commerce, in his brave Madison Square Garden Speech, which got him canned) he could have brought the conflict, with its attendant harsh anticommunism, to an end. Instead, he became one of its victims, though obviously quite moderate himself, as befitting the son and grandson of the editors of the leading Midwestern farm paper, *Wallace's Farmer*. "What ifs" don't interest me; my regret is that I lacked the intellectual and moral stamina, at that time, to see the task through; he was a great man—again one I could admire and trust.

My vendetta against wealth is at best superficial, if not altogether put on for special occasions—not least because, from an analytical standpoint, *structure* is far more fruitful as a starting point than is personality to a systematic inquiry. I only raised the point so that the reader may know better my possible biases and train of thought, and to introduce several other observations pertinent to the education of a (sometime) radical, and hence, to the content and construction of the present study. From the above, it should be apparent that I do not think being radical is license for either intolerance or narrowness, nor do I consider radicalism an absolutist "project"—virtue incarnate, the solution to all societal difficulties, the end all and be all which defines, or should, human strivings. In these examples— FDR, Adlai Stevenson, Henry Wallace—the first two decidedly conservative, and the third, a transcendent thinker (international peace, attacks on domestic privation) who yet does not abandon capitalism, we have gradations on the use of government to rectify social ills, implement just distributive policies (e.g., progressive taxation, public job creation, dedicated regulatory agencies and cabinet departments), and create a political-ideological climate sympathetic to labor organization, the creation of a social safety net (yes, as an entitlement rather than an illegitimate charge on society) and, as summarized in Roosevelt's Four Freedoms address, the nation's commitment to basic guarantees of the individual's security and well-being. Merely to state the inner voice of conscience defining the formulation and implementation of public policy, as I believe would apply to all three men, suggests many things: (a) how far the US has degenerated over the last half-century in meeting the obligations which attach to a democratic polity; (b) how far

the Obama administration, despite acting under so-called liberal auspices, has clashed with *every one* of these—given past efforts at their achievement—reasonable expectations and goals; and (c) how, taking these three once again, no litmus test suffices, for me, to determine their worth, which is to say, radicalism per se is wholly artificial when divorced from its concretization in practice.

FDR had the National Recovery Administration under Hugh Johnson, which conserved capitalism via the power of trade associations and the concentration of business (i.e., monopolization under government auspices), which is a highly conservative framework that runs counter to recovery and equitable wealth distribution. Yet, if one constructed a pie chart (which I haven't, nor has anyone to my knowledge), it would be clear that the tail did not wag the dog. Business recovery—I'll give it 20% of the pie—had to be weighed against giant leaps forward in both the social safety net and the regulatory apparatus, as well as the massive improvement in infrastructure, the principle of *public* employment, relief, and repair of the national estate, and, less tangible, but hardly unimportant, the attack on the Court for obstructing New Deal welfarism, thereby breaking the log jam on policies to that end and leading to appointments sympathetic to upholding regulatory and distributive legislation. Here, in toto, my guess of 80%. If today, with the dismantling of regulation in key areas, e.g., banking, and its ineffectuality, e.g., SEC, FDA, Interior, plus the intended cutting open, after much snipping away, of the social safety net, and the massive allocation of social wealth to defense, I would reverse the New Deal configuration; today 80% pro-business, 20% social welfare. This last is all-important, because the armed drone for targeted assassination cannot be abstracted from a governmental and societal context demonstrably wedded to a hardened ideological posture ill-tuned to human needs and internal national priorities covering everything from public health to rutted highways and collapsing bridges, inadequate educational facilities and opportunities to decaying inner cities, a culture of militarism run riot to paralysis in the face of gun violence. The New Deal was not Nirvana. But given the *Great Depression*, it did not shirk its responsibility to the common weal, and, in proportion to available resources compared with that today, it did remarkably well with what it had. Ask, if it were possible, the young men in CCC, the unemployed, in WPA, the programs large and small that conserved the people's health, spirits, and skills, the homes saved from foreclosure, step-after-step head and shoulders above today's indifference to human life—a context, I would insist, combined with the technological means of execution (pardon the pun, not intended), that makes the armed drone *ideal* for purposes of pursuing America's self-interest defined by its hierarchical structure of power. Not by happenstance, the drone has become Obama's signature weapons system, for its own sake, for the close collaboration it facilitates between the CIA and elite military units (the CIA then taking on paramilitary functions), and for the bases and airstrips worldwide it requires as essential to its operations, thus providing the pretext or rationale for establishing hegemonic US presence in critical regions as part of long-term geopolitical strategies pursuant to global political stabilization on lines favorable to trade-and-investment expansion—and, the element of fear driving the program and making assassination acceptable, the warding off or postponing of national decline.

I won't attempt here a comparable analysis of Adlai Stevenson and Henry Wallace, except to say that political integrity, which both possessed in abundance, trumps radicalism as a working formulation, not because radicalism is somehow suspect, but because integrity creates elasticity in policy making and hones in on people's needs, whether the national ethos or the United States Congress holds otherwise. When I think of Wallace I think of his manifesto, a milk bottle on every doorstep, and when I think of Stevenson, I think of selfless hard work and austerity (the wonderful

campaign pin, imaginary feet on the desk, a hole in his sole) and, like FDR and Wallace, above suspicion of personal enrichment or self-aggrandizement. On the latter, self-aggrandizement, dissident and/or disillusioned observers are more and more coming to see Obama, his abandonment by his father a salient fact of his personal history, in pursuit of recognition for its own sake, unmindful of specific public policy demands except those which favor wealth and the wealthy and powerful with whom he identifies. I see in him, the drone campaign in mind, a moral void, but also a *policy* void, from the standpoint of advancing societal welfare. He would be ill-suited to join the company of the other three, but not his own kitchen cabinet of Geithner, Brennan, and assorted political honchos like Axelrod or Rhodes. More on this later, especially the moral void. Obama *is* very much involved in policy. He is no-one's puppet or fool. But the crux of his policy framework, synthesizing deregulation and militarism, with, as an offshot or even source of further propulsion the Pacific-first strategy for the containment and isolation of China, has little to do with the democratization of American society and, although done repeatedly in its name, counterterrorism per se, with this last becoming indistinguishable from counterrevolution abroad and the silencing of dissent and open palm to business expansion at home.

I noted that radicalism is not license for intolerance or narrowness. To advance societal welfare does not need cosmetics—the red flag; May Day parades, dances, and picnics; spellbinding rhetoric; or even formulaic pronouncements from Marx, Lenin, Trotsky—as enjoyable or comforting as some or all of these are, but rather a foundational discipline, nonelitist in origin and intent, that derives its strength from uncompromising moral-ethical standards inscribed in the collective mind-set (I do not mean by that totalitarian mind-control, but, perhaps in my untutored reading of Rousseau many years ago, the assent of the body politic—general will(?)—because commending itself qua principles as conforming to the realizable condition of *equality*, departures from which being disallowed through the administration and rule of law) and finds legitimation in the actual cultural-institutional promotion and safeguarding of a comprehensive doctrine of human rights. I believe that avoids the pitfalls of narrowness, where some single variable, say, the means of production, provides the criterion (here, through state ownership and the consequent elimination of private property) for definitional success and the automatic achievement of individual and social welfare. It *ain't* always that easy. Abolition of private property, alone, without further institutional change, including the thorough democratization of the bureaucratic and military power bases, may represent swapping one form of tyranny for another. I want equality in the resulting mix, as a dominating influence.

What, then, of intolerance, the other element radicalism does not license and should eschew? Here, in its somewhat habitual dogmatism about the sources of belief and action (we leave ideology aside as a sitting duck when it comes to rigid mental traits, although not always, depending on the content and values espoused), we come to the conundrum of religion, because of its potential for either repression or emancipation in the human assertion of and struggle for freedom. Radicalism tends to be preclusive in this regard, bordering on snideness, in its disparagement of theological-based, as opposed human-centered and secularist, religion. Paradoxically, FDR—I think honestly, not opportunistically—regarded religion as the counterweight to conservatism, as, instead, self-evident precepts which justified the New Deal program even at its most advanced. I refer, first, to his youth, under the tutelage of Rev. Endicott Peabody at Groton, who had the ritual each night, in the library, of shaking hands with each student upon going up to bed, this as part of a whole regimen teaching fair play, mutual respect, a personal code of honor. With this background, then,

when pressed by reporters later as president about the socialist and radical nature of the New Deal programs, Roosevelt buoyantly replied, disagreeing with the implied charge that they were subversive or worse still, saying simply, “These were Groton ideals,” a statement I shall always remember, as an antidote to smug dismissals of potential nonradical sources of democratic change, structural and otherwise. Groton was not in Young Franklin’s day, or any time since, about to usher in the proletariat revolution. So what? I had participated in enough civil-rights demonstrations in the South in the 1960s (and one on my own in 1951, when weeks after high school graduation, I entered the University of Florida, and, meeting a young black student who was in library science at Morehouse, and who was from Gainesville, brought him into the Library through the front door, checked out Gunnar Myrdal’s *American Dilemma*, made a show of handing it to him, invited him subsequently up to my dorm room to discuss it, and that night was almost lynched by drunken Kappa Alpha students—KA the primal Confederate bastion, with a daily call to colors, of its day—but after constant battering against the door, and filling the room with boiling water through the open transom from a large wastebasket in the hall bathroom, the door, a legacy of New Deal construction, fortunately held, and in the utter desolation of the scene, total emptiness in the street and surroundings because this was all-university rush night, I was rescued when my roommate, his father a major crime figure widely known, returned early, sized up the situation, quietly warned them with a deft hand at the hip that he would get the boys after them if they did not immediately disperse, and they finally left) to come to know and respect the clergy who would show up, bear witness, help in any way they could. Religion does not have to be the opiate of the people, whether or not private property is left intact. E.g., those of my generation will fondly recall Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*, and historians, the Social Gospel movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Florida was a learning experience. Walking through the *front* door of the Library with my friend, in the South of enforced racial segregation, was a small gesture which would ordinarily have consequences of an untoward kind, except that on the whole the University of Florida was, even in the early ‘50s, an oasis rich in learning, good will, talent, and, in the cracks, genuine radicalism. I think of Manning Dauer and William G. Carleton, highly respected political scientists, who stared down a state legislative committee on its usual witch hunt. It had demanded the cleansing of the book shelves for Carleton’s C-1 American Institutions course occupying the ground floor reading room of the Library, to which they made reply, journeying to Tallahassee, by reading aloud a whole list of inflammatory quotations, the committee’s anger intensifying to the boiling point, until Dauer or Carleton (I forget which) said, “Gentlemen, every one of these quotations was taken from the Bible.” One more invasion of the university temporarily deflated, although in this period, in my freshman year, a beloved teacher of Ancient History, who had been a member of the Teacher’s College Union at Harvard in 1939, and from a sterling Republican family in Pennsylvania, was summarily fired simply because he had been *called* before the House Un-American Activities Committee for his union membership. There was no citation, the encounter was friendly. But to be called was enough. Returning on the train, John Reynolds stopped at the Jacksonville station the next morning to pick up a paper, only to find his picture plastered on the front page under the headline “UF Professor Fired.” Yes, we circulated petitions in his favor—to no avail. Still earlier in Florida, my support of Wallace in ‘48, and more so, Claude Pepper in 1950, caused some murmurs and pushing and shoving, the point being, one could experience the growing pains of political and social awareness—and take the measure of American society—from a relatively early age. Whether that becomes a journey of self-discovery lasting through one’s lifetime, is of course the difficult challenge.



The Stanford years, 1954-56, truly a distinguished university, rivaling Harvard, e.g., in mathematics and physics, took me a step beyond Florida insofar as bringing to the surface conflicting personal tendencies, some not always for the better. Seriousness of purpose, to be achieved through an academic career, was somehow splintered because of the richness of the feast—too much on offer, spreading me thin and, in the process, pressing radicalism into a more genteel mold. It didn't have to happen that way; the dabbler in me, to which I gladly succumbed, trumped the truly engaged. Yet, it occurs to me now, not at the time, that at work, beyond the sunshine of a seeming Eisenhower calm, was that for me the source of, or better, stimulus to, radicalism had been opposition to racial segregation in the South, and that once removed from that societal context, I needed to get my bearings and achieve greater specificity of understanding so as to approach exploitation, human degradation, the mushroom cloud and nuclear testing, issues of power and stratification, in terms of a more *generic* radicalism, still beyond my reach. So much about Stanford, the very absence of segregation, the pure delight of learning, even lunchtime tennis, all combined to make radicalism not so much remote as artificial, expressed in conversations with the few Marxists around, rather than settings that afforded a testing ground for meaningful action. I did, however, start an NAACP college chapter there (the usual response for conservative institutions, graffiti—as I remember—about blue suede shoes), which led to a friendship with Franklin Williams, NAACP western regional director, and our weekend tours visiting chapters in Fresno, Stockton, and elsewhere. (Frank later became Kennedy's ambassador to Ghana, and still later, president of the Barnes Foundation.) I suspect, however, his mission on these trips was to root out alleged communist influence at the local level. I also shook hands with W.E.B. DuBois at a San Francisco meeting of the Independent Progressive Party, the IPP itself being far to the left of anything going in California at the time—although nothing came of the encounter. In the '56 primary, IPP backed Estes Kefauver over Stevenson, which left me cold, and, regrettably, I was not able to benefit from my meeting with Dr. DuBois, until years later when I assigned his writings to my students.

I was too young to be other than an ideological journeyman, all the right answers, in glib, terse form. Going from Quad to Yard, Stanford to Harvard, was done because I recognized that through no fault of Stanford I was spinning my wheels, and that following in Freidel's footsteps had integral meaning to me as well as providing the escape hatch for a new start. Harvard compressed into five years several jumps in political consciousness, not worth delineating except to say that despite the national calm, picketing had become a part-time occupation. Friday afternoons we gathered on Boston Common, opposite the State House, forming a circle around Gaby Kolko who stood on a soap box in the center, the issues being nuclear testing *and* the plan to move state government across town to Framingham (during a nuclear attack—as though getting there on a clear day in less than an hour was possible). Police photographers faithfully recorded our faces as we passed, no doubt sent on to higher authority, and promptly at 5:30 workers disgorged from the MTA to jostle us, grab our signs—the expected response, as when hard hats beat up peace workers in New York during the Vietnam War. And Saturday mornings we picketed in front of Woolworth's, in the Square, to protest segregated lunch counters in the South, Linus Pauling on occasion joining us. These activities were good for the soul, but in Cambridge it was the mind, not the soul, that counted for the long term—and I say "Cambridge" advisedly, for one's education in radicalism came not from within but outside of, and perhaps owing little to, Harvard. Of course there was Freidel, and Louis Hartz, brilliant beyond words, and Talcott Parsons, with whom I read Max Weber, and on and on (I omit my second mentor for now, so that I can refer to him more fully later), each one

invaluable in laying down building blocks without which neither my radicalism nor my identity and aspirations could find adequate lodgment. Radicalism as an intellectual process, just as in social protest, proceeds from the ground up. Harvard had no such intention, which is fine because it might well have botched the job, but in providing lifetime equipment for self-development it was nonpareil.

It also acted as a magnet, at least in 1956-'61, for gathering in one place the displaced intellectuals from the war, the avowed Marxists who made their home there while (for some) working in New York, and the independent scholars attracted to Widener and pursuing writing that they conceived in decades—including the perennial graduate students who could mark, say, 18G, for eighteenth-year student, on their book requests. A heady brew, and a serious one, which might never translate into action, or even into completed studies, yet the lifeblood for pushing forward seminal ideas to those yet to come. I was fortunate to join what could informally be thought of as the Marxist study group, which met weekly at the office of the American Friends Service Committee, with—if we had a press agent—what could be called a stellar cast, including such regulars as Paul Sweezy and Dirk Struick—and a man I owe much to, precisely in apprehending the structural foundations of capitalism, Fritz Pappenheim, whose book was entitled *The Alienation of Modern Man*. Fritz and Yvonne, though from an older generation, Fritz having fled Nazi Germany almost too late, spending the war interned in a Spanish prison camp, until Paul Tillich somehow intervened to get him out, were among our closest friends, and it is my discussion of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in the body of this book which in spirit I owe to him. I am not a Marxist (said not defensively, for purposes of self-protection, but simply because I do not think myself bright enough), but his early philosophic writings on alienation and commodity structure, which before Harvard I knew only in passing, has made an indelible impression on me in getting at problems central to armed drones for targeted assassination, notably, the desensitization of the individual (and the whole society) to killing, the impersonal murder of men, women, children, in this case, from 8,000 miles away, without blinking—a society whose emblem should be the *blood spat*, for the vaporization of human beings, rather than the stars and stripes. Fritz made seriousness of purpose and disciplined study not only mandatory for the life of the mind, but a social obligation if one is to fulfill one's purpose in living. Not for the self alone—are you listening, Mr. President?

My second mentor, though serving that function for a far shorter period, brings together in his person much that I have said thus far. Barrington Moore *is/is not* Harvard. He was a senior research fellow at the Russian Research Center and gave what is probably the most significant course, regardless of field, in the University, aptly paraphrased—because I forgot how it was listed—by the title of one of his books, *Political Power and Social Theory*, a collection of essays that takes nothing for granted, as for example, the fashionable tendency to link industrialism and totalitarianism, which he, displaying his breadth of historical knowledge, critiques in an essay about totalitarianism in *preindustrial* societies. A classics major at Williams which lasted him in good stead throughout his life, he possessed a mental clarity equal to confronting the most difficult issues in sociological analysis, such as the historical pattern of development of three principal structural-cultural variants of the modern world: capitalism, fascism, communism. His book *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, where that analysis can be found, ranks with that of the most accomplished scholars of the twentieth century (and I don't say that lightly). It is a guide for the dissection of social systems, their rise and fall, their internal mechanisms of repression and, often

less likely, liberation, the role of the peasantry in making or retarding revolution, and the relation of political economies to the formation of class structures.

That itself is enough to have elevated him to a position of highest esteem in my personal universe, but it is something else—character—that for present purposes, the book on armed drones, how we got to the bottom of the moral heap, and Obama as presidential leader, that should be recorded here. I spoke above of wealth (my own emphasis, rather, is on social structure and political culture, not least because of Moore's teachings), which undeniably comes into play in current policy making and US geopolitical strategy, and my lament at the ignorance and shortsightedness of America's upper stratum, today a hodgepodge of one-generation ascent through illicit banking, hedge funds, and gambling (whether as derivatives or the real thing, Las Vegas casinos), *nouveau riche* as a New Colossus of Reaction, as well as the disposition of wealth in general—old or new—to oppose and obstruct democratic processes. Still, as in my example of FDR, the one-in-a-million person free from pressures, social, financial, familial, to rise above greed, self-indulgence, conspicuous display, hostility toward perceived class enemies (i.e., the working class), and all-around cruelty to other humans as a god-given prerogative of status and station, has to count for something. The key to such a person, I find, is austerity, more, an ascetic cast, and with it, *humility*, not just turning off the lights when leaving a room, but coming to teach a Harvard class riding in on a one-speed bike, wearing a heavy woolen lumberjack outer garment. That is Moore, old Plymouth Suburban wagon, ambling gait, silver steel-rimmed round glasses. Why my fuss on this? I guess, an FDR-fixation, but really, a reaching back to an older America, by no means idyllic in actuality, yet possessing the clarity by which to know right from wrong, even when the wrong predominates, for at least then one can fight back.

Moore's wealth derives from family, Morgan partnerships, which is simply taken for granted and has no effect on lifestyle. The saw, the Lodges speak only to the Cabots (or is it the reverse?), and the Cabots speak only to God, might be rephrased, skipping a step, to read: the Moores speak only to...Marcuse; in other words, the rare atmosphere, admittedly snobbish, of intellection (Moore met his wife Betty, who is of Japanese descent, when both, I believe, were in the OSS during the war, she, having an amazing mind in her own right) with a radical social-philosophy bent. Moore could be pedantic. (Once running into him on Mass. Avenue, all excited because I had just read a Ralf Dahrendorf piece discussing class, in a sociology journal, a forbidden topic in American social science in the 1950s, and knowing his sympathy, I asked if he had read it: "No, I refused, because he misspelled a Greek word in the footnotes"—my rough paraphrase.) Silly? No, the kind of mind that could shake mountains—and would have, in a society unafraid to think, although my guess is that few today know *Social Origins* (published in 1966), and fewer still who are willing to put capitalism on the examining table.

Yes, asceticism has its foibles, although not fatally injurious, because always hidden from view, in this case, "Vespera," a magnificent sloop, built in the Netherlands, brought over, and sailing out of Northeast Harbor ME, the Rockefellers as guests just before Nancy and I arrived, and Betty and Barry reading to each other in Greek at bedtime. I present this brief portrait, not to exonerate a miniscule segment of great wealth, or to probe others' private lives, but, as a tool of comparative analysis, to plumb inner character, the raw stuff of human decency, applicable to all, rich and poor, literate and not, as a way of determining some rough correlates of personal integrity. And from everything I see, Obama is no Martin Luther King, no FDR, Stevenson, or Henry Wallace, no

Barrington Moore, just the overambitious, prickly, secretive, deceitful, self-indulgent, soft (in the sense of wanting luxury and the trappings of power), and, beneath the contrived rhetoric, itself empty and incapable of expressing emotion (think FDR's "Fireside Chats"), a profoundly disturbing—to the world—nihilism, capable of, and on a daily basis authorizing, *impersonal murder*. Would Dr. King resort to political assassination, himself the victim of it? Would FDR incinerate children? Would Adlai Stevenson huddle with his national-security team and flip baseball cards to finger the next victim? Would Henry Wallace make his chief adviser a person who endorsed waterboarding and other forms of extreme torture? Would Barrington Moore, Fritz Pappenheim, Louis Hartz, or Frank Freidel deliberately lie about civilian casualties, construct a system (maybe Herman Kahn would, or some at the RAND Corporation) in which "pilots" sitting comfortably 8,000 miles away would zap persons frequently identity unknown and whether or not in a family setting, or for good measure, go after *second strikes* targeting the funerals of the victims or the first responders who have gone to their rescue? The White House should be draped in black.

I left Gabriel Kolko standing on a soap box on Boston Common. For those unfamiliar with his writings, let me record my indebtedness—hence his influence on my thinking—for his unparalleled contribution to radical scholarship, particularly in the areas of income distribution, the interpenetration of business and government, and an expansionist, market-driven, counterrevolutionary foreign policy as the impetus to war and intervention. Taken together, a body of work extending over more than fifty years, Kolko has achieved a unified analysis of the American political economy like practically none other, because with unfailing insight he has identified and probed the structural dynamics of US capitalism in their exposed and revealing nerve centers: business concentration, the reinforcement of inequitable shares of wealth and power, government protection of, and assistance to, the corporate system, and the militarization of foreign policy, as vital to establishing unilateral dominance of the global economy. In this respect, if he had stopped writing in, say, 1970, he would already have diagramed the main contours in all essentials of subsequent development. He deserves better of the academic world—at the least, respect for his scholarly independence, fantastic output, and revelatory treatment of what is often hidden (especially from historians), America's antidemocratic dimensions of structure, power, and conduct.

When I turn to my first teaching post, Yale, 1961-65, the intellectual scene dramatically shifts, insofar as experiencing the freedom to think and act along radical lines. Yale was not Harvard. (Today, given the homogenization of American higher education, exemplified in the astronomical salaries of college and university presidents, and the decline in Harvard's own intellectual standards—from Conant and Pusey to Larry Summers, operating a hedge fund out of the president's office, says it all—and Yale's final shaking off of hauteur, seems to be bringing them into convergence.) Yale, then, was a living hell for radical faculty, although in all fairness, this was a disease largely confined to the history department, for some reason though itself carrying disproportionate weight in the Yale community, as the repository for such Old Blue values as anti-Semitism and the valuing of social background over intelligence, ability, and achievement. Fortunately, the graduate schools, remaining uncontaminated, could maintain, as in the law and medical schools, very high standards. History set a tone within itself, and for others, remained an oasis, of arch reaction, hautiness, precosity. Democratic recruitment was ignored for social pedigree, itself coded for dress and appearance, correct religious standing, and prestigious secondary, college, and graduate-school education. How I stumbled into this lion's den is still a mystery, probably my critique of Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform*, although with a Harvard

Ph.D. in hand, and a book accepted by Harvard Press, and still to be offered only an instructorship, should have alerted me to troubled seas in future.

The storm broke at the interview. George Wilson Pierson, as we walked back ahead of the others from lunch, observed, in majestic condescension, "I see from your curriculum vitae that you attended the University of Florida. How quaint, we've never had anyone from there before." Rather than slug him or announce the termination of the interview, I let the remark and its patronizing tone pass. Upon arrival, it was clear that, despite coat and tie, my Sears workshirt and Jack Purcells, which went unremarked at Harvard for five years (four as a teaching fellow and tutor) were unacceptable—and openly ridiculed by Pierson when, standing next to me at Sterling Library, he sniffed me up and down as if I were unclean, and much later, when Arno Mayer was being interviewed for a professorship and requested that I be at the luncheon, Pierson sent me home and told me to get dressed—whether or not I made the luncheon, I don't remember, but later on I spoke to Arno, telling him about the intellectual climate, and, certainly not from my advice, I am pleased that he did not come. His work was and is far superior to anything being done in his areas at Yale.

Fortunately too, my students (I gave the junior honors seminar, and directed most of their senior theses) were, regardless of background, from legacy entrants who enjoyed preferential treatment, to those also from wealthy backgrounds, to the bursary students on assistance (a distinct minority), hard-working, open-minded, bright, unspoiled, deeply sincere, and therefore a pleasure to teach. Ideology was never at issue; spirited discussion gloriously blazed in the spirit of mutual respect and trust. That has always been my way. Ideology, imposed by me or anyone else, stops at the classroom door; restrictions on thought harm proponents and critics alike. Senior theses, likewise. Provided I kept my distance from the department, no complaints; the problem was, I was always under a cloud of suspicion. For example, the other Lord High Executioner, John Morton Blum, he, of velvet lapels, charged that I was a Marxist; after reading the copy I presented to him of my book, *The Populist Response to Industrial America*, he solemnly intoned, "Marxism is not in my pantheon of ideas." Fine, except that Hartz was one of the readers of the dissertation (the other, Freidel), and himself a noted conservative political theorist for his application of Lockean principles to America, who, at our conference in his office, gleefully paced up-and-down, saying he would have modified his ideas in light of my evidence on the seriousness and extent of Populist protest. Hartz lived for pure intellection; Freidel, the professional of all professionals, seen on every page of his multivolume *FDR*, also knew my respect for evidence, as in our collaboration later on an extensive documentary history of the United States. Besides, there is a whole chapter in *Populist Response* showing the hostility of contemporary Marxists (DeLeon and the Socialist Labor Party) to the Populists. Blum read with deaf ears, guided by a prejudgment perhaps attributable to his own identification with *Theodore* Roosevelt and their shared contempt for social protest. Roosevelt once lamented that he and his Rough Riders couldn't take a shot at those Haymarket rioters! Blum probably lamented that he couldn't take a shot at those who wrote about them.

There is a lesson to be learned here. Don't ever get a radical mad, for he might be tempted—even driven—to take down the entire edifice, speaking figuratively of course. And so, it happened. I did not shy away from controversy, whether at Yale itself or in the sanctum of professional meetings, where I learned also that, like other professions, historians look out for their own. Criticism is not wanted. I introduced Herbert Aptheker at the Law School, in an impassioned plea for freedom of discussion—generally denied to him because of his Communist affiliation, despite

the fact that his work was prosaic, conventional, and moderate to a fault. I also was the commentator for a session of the Organization of American Historians, in which the paper, by John Higham, an otherwise good historian, was perfectly abysmal, a presumed exploration of “cultural history” (Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., would have turned in his grave) arguing that the strains of industrialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (no further historical specificity) were manifested in birdwatching, bicycle clubs, stream of consciousness in Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs, and the like—with not a word about depression, unemployment, strikes, lockouts, declining living standards, and other “strains” integral to what all agree, or almost all, was an Age of Violence, from, say, the Great Railroad Strikes of 1877 to Homestead and Pullman, 1892, ’94. I dissected the paper piece-by-piece with growing tension in the room (the ballroom of the Cleveland Statler, Higham sitting back, his St. Francis expression frozen in place—the next commentator, Robert K. Murray, who wrote about the Red Scare—from what he said, he should know—raising his fist and saying, “This was a great paper,” the audience standing and cheering), an undescrivable scene, which ended on, for me, a dramatic note. Pierson rushed to the front of the platform, face contorted in hatred, and kept shaking his fist at me, until Edmund Morgan escorted him away. The next day, on the plane back, according to Howard Quint, an historian of American socialism, who was present, Pierson went up and down the aisle, apologizing to all that I was at Yale. For an assistant professor who was to come up for tenure—Ha, the machinery was grinding away.

The lesson was sinking in. I had by now burned my bridges behind me. During the time-frame I drove an interracial group of Divinity School students down to Selma, immediately after the suppression on the Pettus Bridge (more on this below), which could not be directly faulted—I was on a Morse Fellowship, and hence released from teaching—except that *any* sign of activism violated the gentleman’s code of bored neutrality, conjuring the notion of upstart and troublemaker, whether the cause was justified or not. Another speck of trouble: I published a critique, the lead article in the *Journal of American History*, of Oscar Handlin’s famous article charging Populist anti-Semitism. The documentation was impressive, only all except two pieces were irrelevant to the topic, being non-Populist, outside the period, and, my favorite (as I recall after nearly 50 years), based on innuendo: F. Scott Fitzgerald was born, in 1896, in Ignatius Donnelly’s Minnesota. Handlin never replied. He even screwed up on Donnelly, who in one novel wrote a *philo*-Semitic account of Jewish persecution and prophetically depicted a return to Israel. Blum, a Handlin student, was somewhat chagrined. None of this has importance, except to remind the reader of the attempt by American historians from the 1950s on to discredit social protest in the nation’s past, what was then and probably still is called the Consensus Thesis. The need to demolish Populism grew out of the celebration of US hegemony in the world and unrestrained capitalism at home. No one wanted to hear about depression, poverty, and the people’s awakening to fight against corporations, railroads, market fixers, who brought on social misery, even though long ago. For the past must be untarnished, to mythologize the present as well.

The highlight, or coup de grace, in my battle against Yale history, was a bit of guerilla warfare, founded on the recognition that sometimes political theater is the best way, or even the only way, to counter the forces of Reaction, itself humorless in its destructive practices and values. This was still, actually, in the third year, when I gave the first semester of the American survey, which conventionally ended in 1865 and the close of the Civil War. The lectures were in Strathcona Hall, a superb imitation of cathedral-like architecture, long narrow, limestone throughout, a balcony; one could almost be forgiven for thinking one was at Oxford. The inspiration for my plan was Zero

Mostel's staging of "Springtime for Hitler," in such poor taste and so ghastly as to precipitate numbness and bewilderment among the audience. My friend and co-conspirator, for he too had issues with Yale, was Jesse Lemisch, whose work on the active role of the seamen in the American Revolution led to his magnificent, important formulation, "History from the bottom up." It was also Jesse, on Tap Night, who strung a wire in front of Sterling, so that when the pledges marched in lock step cross campus, on their way to the secret societies, he pulled the wire and toppled the whole lot of them. I could not have wished for a better colleague, though we were ultimately sent to Coventry for our action. Jesse also had the temerity to question the long-standing department practice of having doctoral candidates, dressed in tuxedo, present their thesis prospectus to an evening meeting. Unfailingly, cultivation and dress made the man, while the term "scholar" had too much the taint of professionalism, a concern raised by Pierson when he found my seminar reading list too specialized.

Simply, we would re-enact the Lincoln assassination. Ten seconds remained in the course. I grew quiet, somberly reflecting on the problems facing Lincoln, the burdens of Reconstruction weighing heavily on his shoulders, when...when...Lemisch shot me, and falling over the lectern I managed to smear myself with the catsup in my pocket, a bloody mess. Absolute silence, disbelief. I snuck a peek, the students were open-mouthed, dumbstruck, when Lemisch from the balcony shouted "Sic semper tyrannus," all eyes turned upward, he with a machete between his teeth and raised arm holding a smoking pistol. That broke the silence. Huge waves of applause. Pierson, Blum, Morgan, angry, fit to be tied. Yale had a tradition of playing pranks (provided one was in the charmed circle). A. Whitney Griswold often cut up, but I was not A. Whitney Griswold, nor would this one have occurred to him. Soon I was out, Jesse as well. Strathcona Hall is still standing. The Hall of Graduate Studies is still standing. I'm afraid political theater can go only so far.

Radicalism can be a jealous mistress, demanding conformity to certain texts, nonpleasurable interests and activities, a need to prove one's credentials. That I think is stultifying, and worse, forced. It doesn't serve either the deepening of compassion or the widening of mental horizons. When I introduced our Saint Bernard puppy to Sweezy and the Marxist study group as Karl Marx, a name Nancy and I lovingly and whimsically gave him, no one would talk to me for a week or two. There is no reason why rigidness and radicalism should go together. Thus, from Florida through Yale, less so after, I was truly a sometime radical, less the poseur than, ashamedly, the aesthete, for long periods seeing aesthetics, primarily music and painting, as somehow liberating if not revolutionary forces in the battle against false consciousness and in activating a disciplined quest for higher social standards. This was, at best, a backdoor attack on capitalism—probably as ineffectual as political theater (Clifford Odets to the barricades). But it also fashioned my alertness, as in standing before a Cezanne for a half-hour, penetrating its mysteries and techniques until satisfied. Radicalism is about more than private property and social change. It is about an appreciation of human possibilities. It must include the dimension of aesthetics, not only to fight off fatalism or nihilism, but to affirm creativity, whether it be architecture and city planning (as art rather than science), toward a beautiful yet practical environment (in which the pros and cons of everything from ornamentation to sewage removal can be raised and discussed), or string quartets, harpsichord sonatas, the choral works of Britten or Berlioz, toward thinking or imagining on a different wave length, away from clutter and salesmanship, and toward alternative visions of the social order.

This may seem utterly irrelevant to the condemnation of armed drones for targeted assassination, but when faced with cruelty, evil, zombiism, much of that incorporated into the bureaucratic personality and mind-set, a counterforce of sunlight, reason, appreciation of nature, *man creating*, must be part of material efforts at societal reconstruction; otherwise, one swaps one oppressive context for another, the old values and ways still predominating, to the detriment of human freedom. Aesthetics can lead to the clean break—the transformation worth its name (not the mock turtle soup served up by Obama)—so long as it moves parallel with or ahead of the concretization of mass striving as itself directed to the reshaping of political economy, institutions, culture. When I think back at Yale, I also preserve, beyond the usual (pleasures of teaching, the odd confrontation here and there), memories of cameo events, e.g., borrowing an ill-fitting tuxedo from one of the boys to attend the Yale Daily News banquet (the center of the universe in the College, and therefore glared at by history attendees resentful that I was invited), or, probably the same tux, when Nancy and I were asked to chaperon a dance, with the Count Basie orchestra, we sitting on the bandstand by his left hand for much of the evening. Life was hardly all bad. Even the antiwar and civil-rights demonstrations had a nonradical component, which protesters similarly inclined are sometimes loath to admit: One might risk life and limb, as in Mississippi, but less because of intrinsic regard for the cause than because of a compulsion to bear witness, be part of something larger, even put one's body on the line—in sum, embarking on an ego trip best left home or guarded against, if protest is to have meaning, so that one can recover his wits and notuseothers and their suffering for his own ends. That would be almost as bad as getting one's kicks by targeting funerals and first responders, for in both cases fellow human beings are reduced to ciphers. Again, are you listening Mr. President?

There was always the danger that protest might become a way of life offering its own gratification, and with it, almost necessarily, not just a tincture of arrogance and self-righteousness. Tenure was farther away than Mars; it was therefore time to get serious. I shall never be Odets, nor Brecht for that matter. To be Jewish and from *Bridgeport* (we moved when I was six)—the word literally spat out by would-be patricians and their imitators—was a double whammy. Blum, succeeding Pierson as chair, called me in while I had the Morse, an unheard of summons while on research leave—and said I might stay several more years, even have a graduate seminar, but I knew it was time to leave. Tenure is important when one is starting a family and more so when the factor of radicalism looms large in the possible denial of an appointment, much less the achievement of security.

I left quietly. Why give the powers that be, satisfaction that if I encouraged student demonstrations on my behalf, that would be taken as confirmation of their indictment that I was irresponsible and sought to politicize the learning process? Better to wash one's hands of the whole business, and, rather than play the usual games—networking in search of a prestigious position—take whatever comes, as the opportunity for further teaching, intellectual growth, and continued social protest. No complaints; unlike many, much worse off, I landed on my feet. In 1965, Detroit was a seething cauldron, especially after Palo Alto, Cambridge, and New Haven. I don't know how I got the Wayne State job, I had not, to my knowledge, interviewed for it or otherwise been in communication, and I assume that Mother Yale took the initiative in making arrangements for its cast-offs. C. Vann Woodward, whom I respected and with whom I had a good working relationship, said reassuringly, "Norman, you're going to love Wayne State, you're going to love the museums and restaurants, and you're really going to love Chicago." Poor guy, didn't even know where it



was! And Staughton Lynd, a most decent person, a Quaker, who went to Hanoi personally to declare peace with the North Vietnam government (political theater at its symbolic finest), a highly esteemed teacher, and the son of Robert and Helen Lynd, knowing our plans, notified Detroit peace groups of our arrival. The next day, I addressed a mammoth peace rally in Grand Circus Park. (Staughton was himself fired shortly after we left—so much for academic freedom at Yale.)

What a new ball game: Black Trotskyites (poseurs, blow-hards, with far greater dramatic ability than Olivier playing *Hamlet*); Detroit's Tactical Mobile Unit (cruising in their blue-and-white Plymouths, four burley men per car, probably 270 lbs. average weight, not counting hardware and axe handles); the CIA-sponsored group of young fascists, Breakthrough, who crowded to the front of the rallies raising a din so loud as to drown out the speakers); and yes, the *history* chairman, a powerhouse, former longshoreman, who cowed the department into submission, and, in the spirit of Eric Hoffer—as I recall him—a specialist in civil liberties (like pedophiles who go to the elementary schools, Willie Sutton, to the banks, Alfred H. Kelley went to civil liberties to rape, rob, and tarnish it blind). At one point, when a diminutive young girl led a demonstration to the president's office in Mackenzie Hall, Kelley stood foursquare at the door and, blocking the way, then stepped forward and with a roundhouse right to the jaw knocked her flat. That is not Yale's way, but from my limited sampling I've come to regard history, as practiced, more as a pathology than a discipline of learning.

Detroit did not have the visibility that New York and Berkeley had on the national protest front, but it was a veritable maelstrom centered on the Wayne campus, with all of the principals gathered in battle array. Four episodes, in no particular order, illustrate the scene. First, the day following the murder of Dr. King a memorial was held at Lower DeRoy, a smallish auditorium, in which the black student leaders spoke. I was horrified, for I had seen him several times in the week before the big (celebrity) Selma to Montgomery March, was greatly moved by his eulogy for the Rev. Jim Reeb, a Boston Unitarian minister, who was murdered on the streets of Selma the preceding Monday. Brown's Church was unadorned, with a steep surrounding balcony, the entire group attending now standing, swaying back and forth, arms locked, singing "We Shall Overcome." Much of the week we maintained a vigil outside the church until the early hours of the morning, facing a double line of local and state police cars—all perfectly safe, and symbolic—some 18 rows deep. (My more meaningful personal contact with him I'll relate later.) Why horrified? Because speaker after speaker who got up *cursed* Dr. King. This was not grief or anguish crying out, but rank opportunism, the fashionable black militance making a first appearance: We're glad you're dead. You held us back. Your nonviolence is doing us more harm than good. (A faithful paraphrase) The moral stature of the man—nothing; the wider, more radical scope of protest, embodied in the Poor People's Campaign (an immediate circumstance of his death)—nothing; the courage and fortitude that kept him going—nothing.

I was waking up fast. This display of raw anger against Dr. King, disrespect for his work, his ideas, what he represented in the struggle for democratic rights regardless of race and skewed toward the bottom stratum of working people, the braggadocio of those who only talked the talk, all this was becoming too much for me. Was this a small sample, or were blacks peeling off in a direction seemingly more militant, but perhaps actually a kind of black chauvinism, which disregarded *class* and used injured pride now blown up as a negotiating tool for mere recognition and complacent self-indulgence. That is a harsh indictment coming from a radical, and is not meant

as an oblique reference to affirmative action, but as, instead, the more profound negation of political consciousness, emblemized in the person and music of Paul Robeson, where race pride, essential as a first step of identity, becomes subsumed in the fight for the social welfare of *all* people acting and building together. Some in the DeRoy “mourning” group rode black chauvinism, in predominantly black Detroit, to prominence and high office, as meanwhile their adoring constituents were sinking further into poverty.

In an earlier, more focused age, the opportunistic use of race may have served a consolatory function for blacks (perhaps a la Father Divine), but black radicals eschewed this characterization as demeaning *and* short-sighted. They were in it for keeps, the emancipation of the poor on class lines. Race pride meant race solidarity, a closing of ranks around black leadership, however good or poor (which didn’t seem to matter) the record was. With Dr. King’s death, there have been few black leaders who have proven to be radical, i.e., in these circumstances, class-oriented, outspoken in criticism of American foreign policy, and taking on issues that are deemed unrelated to race (actually, nothing is, because blacks as a whole were and remain disproportionately represented as the exploited and dispossessed), such as climate change, banking regulation, massive defense spending, etc., all of which, their leaders maintain, have no bearing not only on race identity and pride but also civil rights (narrowly construed). The world I knew before 1965 is not the world I know after—although, in Detroit, not for want of trying, where I tried to form an antiwar-civil rights coalition. That would have been a *natural* for radicals in the past, but as I learned, radicalism, as I understand it, and black nationalism or chauvinism, as I witnessed it, did not mix.

I am not the one to talk (or, I should say, analyze), because I as much as anyone committed the liberal error on race—one I shrugged off by the early 1970s, but not fully before, despite jarring moments in the decade following Dr. King’s death. I.e., I gave a free pass to anyone who was black simply because he was black. Period. Since that time I have wanted to see an open declaration of the neutralization of race in the American psyche, black and white alike. Of course, we like to think “race neutral” is widely inscribed and practically always professed, whether in law, the economy, politics, or general living. It may be, and to some extent even honored, but somehow at the expense of black progressiveness, really a bargain with the devil in the sense that full acceptance comes at the cost of surrendering an authentic thirst for democracy. Here is where my own bias kicks in. Wrongly, I hold blacks up to a higher standard because I *want* them, along with industrial workers, to be the vanguard of social change, the agent for democratizing the structure of society. Condescending, yes, because in that light they cannot simply be themselves—good and bad, as varied as there are individuals. Not-condescending also, though, because both groups historically have a stake in realizing freedom, and given their life-experiences and treatment have ample reason to accept that role (and ample qualifications to boot) even though it is thankless and others in society who benefit from the status quo don’t deserve—and obviously oppose and resist—the resulting improvements. My romantic attachment to the lower classes (now defined out of existence by the spurious label of “middle class” to hide very real gradations of income, status, and power) is a poor substitute for confronting a reality in which both workers and blacks have, at least for the present, gone to seed, dormant, immersed up to their necks in false consciousness, for one, respectability, the other, racial solidarity, for both, given their respective conditions, accommodation to hierarchy at home, hegemony abroad, to the ultimate detriment of each. In sum, assuming my attitude toward blacks and working people in general was based, as I’m sure many radicals in flashes of self-effacement would admit, on an ideological-mythological craving for

revolutionary transcendence of existing society via human perfection, no slips or blemishes allowed, it is time to grow up, restore pitiless frankness to its proper place and therefore disabuse oneself of wish-fulfillment and the assigning of potential radical significance to groups neither equal to the task nor committed to fulfilling it. No more free passes to those who have not earned them.

What does this have to do with the price of wheat in Shanghai? Nothing. What does it have to do with armed drones for targeted assassination? Everything. If Obama were *white*, he wouldn't stand a chance with a large part of American society, including blacks who, out of a mistaken show of racial solidarity in supporting him, are cutting their own throats. Liberals dare not oppose him, equally because he is black and because *they* have gradually lost their way for at least three decades. Obama is the perfect test of liberalism, revealing its political, economic, above all, moral, bankruptcy, a degeneration of conviction and ideas stemming probably from its unwillingness to stand up to McCarthyism in the 1950s, then its cooptation into a Cold-War bipartisan framework under Kennedy, regularized as a permanent-war mind-set and commitment to a military / defense-oriented economy with the Vietnam War, and, even from the standpoint of traditional Democratic party demands, the adoption domestically of deregulation as the key to growth, particularly under Clinton, so that by 2000, the handwriting is on the wall: the death of the New Deal at the hands of both parties, a long-term shifting of the political spectrum rightward, so that Democrats today in any meaningful sense are right-of-center, while Republicans are skirting the line of plebeian fascism, and in foreign policy an unrestrained push for global stabilization through unilateral superpower status, to be achieved through a global system of military bases, increased naval power, and our friend, the armed drone. Obama is not only the perfect test of liberalism, now that it has for sixty years become associated with business consolidation and the militarization of capitalism and society alike, but also its Lord High Executioner, with respect to the quashing of dissidents, the erection of the National Security State, the advancement of surveillance, pressing forward trends, perhaps amounting to a qualitative change, long in the making. (When one reads about his approval of, and *eagerness* to sign, pending legislation to expand the government's powers of surveillance, assisted by Sen. Feinstein's position on the Intelligence Committee, one realizes how mild, innocent, and out-of-date Orwell's *1984* actually is—probably already by the time of the title, and now a society and its role in the world, just on this dimension, that invites the designation "liberal totalitarianism," Big Brother through guile rather than the naked bayonet.)

The relevance of the preceding discussion of race lies in his personification of a total structural-cultural-ideological context which makes the armed drone possible, *thinkable*, and highly desirable, without which it could be neither strategically nor morally acceptable. Like waterboarding, rendition, military commissions, the existence of Guantanamo, armed drones for targeted assassination has become part of the new norm, the equation of torture with America itself, that has emerged, largely through the decline of traditional restraining forces on the unrestricted use of power. Obama has performed a neat political hat trick—a "threefer" if you will: with his left hand, silenced the black community (who have acted out of racial loyalty) and labor unions (who have been loath to question the Democratic party, and their own place of presumed security and advantage within it), with his right hand, appeased, protected, assisted, strengthened, and coddled what has become the unified structure of wealth and power (which includes the upper groups of banking and finance, as well as the military and intelligence communities), and with both hands, has, as snake-oil salesman par excellence, supported by a superb public-relations machine in the

White House, sold the American public a bill of goods suitably coated with liberal gloss, which has synthesized the financialization and militarization of the American economy into a political framework geared to the execution of more ambitious foreign policy goals (e.g., the Pacific-first strategy) while at home reinforcing the principles and practices of market fundamentalism.

In this light, drone warfare didn't require much selling. The extreme secrecy surrounding its operations perfectly meshes with a public, uncritically identifying with counterterrorism as the new kid or cause on the block, knowing instinctively to shut their eyes to the many excesses committed in its name, the drone itself ideally suited to the glamor of high-tech warfare which supposedly sanitizes killing, so that victims themselves appear not as fellow humans but factitious objects in a giant video game. I will address the question of desensitization as the foundation for making drone warfare and assassination operable, but here we have Obama, stepping forward as essentially the counterrevolutionary figure to all of the social protest occurring in earlier decades, his race a crutch for those who heretofore supported radical causes and now want for whatever reason *out*, and for those in the circles of power (once in franker times, they were referred to as ruling groups or, heaven forbid, the ruling class) his race provided them a singular advantage: he could serve as a front man who, because black, downed all critical discussion, subdued all opposition, from left-leaning—such as are still present—quarters. In Obama's hands, the armed drone *is* America, which alone has the power to turn the tables on its enemies, thought to be legion in number, by making counterterrorism itself an instrument of terror. In the new dispensation, anything goes.

Let me return to Detroit, and the Wayne campus with its turbulence. One rally from the steps of a classroom building, was so tense, with Breakthrough snarling in our face, the campus police—despite my calls for ensuring free speech on university grounds—standing idly by, that a black fellow who had seen it all, ex-Marine, fresh from Mississippi and voter registration, and doing community organizing in East Detroit, had become so unnerved that, to stop his body from shaking I had to grab him from behind to steady him. Facing the giant flag pole, he raised his arm, pointing, and said, “That’s your flag baby, not mine!” That made next morning’s headline in the *Free Press*. Another incident I recall: students picketing military recruitment at the placement office were met by Tactile Mobile officers with axe handles, who bloodied them and drove them off. They scattered, then regrouped and marched to the same classroom steps. (Incidentally they were mostly just kids, as I observed, inexperienced, bookish, my heart going out to them.) I looked down on the scene from the eighth floor of Mackenzie Hall, the bodies sprawled out, colleagues at nearby windows actually jeering, at which point I literally saw red, walked down the eight flights, crossed the street, took the bullhorn, spoke, then walked with it to the Tactile Mobile Unit car parked on the street, and went near-beserk, taunting them to hit me as they did these students. Nothing happened, thank goodness. One final scene: Spring '68, Eugene McCarthy's daughter, Anne, campaigning for her father during the primary season, visited the campus, accompanied by Dustin Hoffman and other friends. Her speech would be outdoors, standing behind the ropes of what looked to be a makeshift boxing ring. Now, instead of Breakthrough, black militants sought to prevent her from speaking. Standing off to the side, I realized how ugly things were getting and stepped into the ring. I thought, wrongly, they would listen to my demand that she be heard, so first—given the mumbo jumbo they were shouting about imperialism—I proceeded with a radical critique of McCarthy's foreign policy (which partly quieted them), and turned the mike over to Anne, who gave a heartfelt speech. As I stepped to the rear of the ring, I saw that Hoffman was shaking (protest was becoming an

occupational hazard) and once again, smothering him to my chest, I felt called upon to hold tight, provide steadiness, and see the party safely out.

I came to Michigan State in 1968, inhospitable to a fault with respect to radicalism and stimulation in general—not the proverbial “cow college,” but a highly sophisticated institution for purposes of making war and servicing corporate needs. Those of us around at the time will remember the *Ramparts* cover of Madame Nu dressed as a Michigan State cheerleader, beanie and all. MSU, under John Hannah, also had a distinguished role in making agriculture a weapon in the Cold War...

JANUARY 11, 2013

### **A Day in the Life of ... Barack Obama**

*[Apologies to Solzhenitsyn for cribbing from his title. Goodnight, Ivan Denisovich, wherever you are. But to be serious: Ordinarily the writer does not reach out to the reader; rightly so, a work should stand on its own. Yet I feel, as part of the work itself, to say something, not in anticipation of failure to communicate, but to provide a minimum of guidance here because I think it may be needed. This is a short piece, not of major consequence to anyone but the writer, but also one that is difficult to read and understand. I refer to the problem of conceptualization. As the title suggests, I have confined or frozen the analysis to a single day, a rather perfunctory one, as the events of our times goes. Yet, by taking three comments I wrote to The New York Times on that one day, in themselves hardly earth-shattering, but having the possibility of illuminating three different, distinct, and important areas of Obama's policies and actions, I believe I was able then to probe more deeply the wider configuration and consequences of his presidency, past and prospective. Regulation, cyberwarfare, military / strategic policy and planning, all three areas touch base on what I have termed elsewhere, a framework of liberal fascism. I hope this explanatory note is not viewed as trespassing the bounds of authorial prerogative.—NPJ]*

Obama's Second Term commences shortly. I expect nothing, except more of the same: financialization and militarization of American capitalism; a *two-pronged* foreign policy already in place (a) the Pacific-first strategy, predicated on heavy weaponry—supercarriers for starters—to surround and contain China, and (b) the heightened use of paramilitary forces, notably, CIA and JSOC, coupled with armed drones for targeted assassination, i.e., counterterrorism qua counterrevolution in Third World regions, and as part of a geopolitical strategy to plant a not-so-light *global* footprint for ensuring US-led political stabilization of the world trading system on terms favorable to American interests; domestic retreat in all pertinent areas, e.g., deregulation of the corporate and banking structure, depredation of the environment and consequent failure to respond to climate change, diminution of the scope and resources of the social safety net, and relatedly, a widening of extremes of wealth and poverty, disparities of power grounded in ideological and systemic features sanctioning unrestrained capital accumulation promoted and protected by the State— but why go on? Wherever one turns, job creation, mortgage foreclosures, health insurance, all the obvious points of contact between a democratic government and its citizenry, the Obama administration, placed on a scale from 1 to 10, is somewhere between 3 and 4, as measured by the potential of a society in light of its wealth and resources. The list is achingly long and I only scratch the surface. As I review it, and factor in the context of militarism, which

breeds acquiescence, and absorbs the funds for societal reconstruction, as well as view each element in turn (whether drone warfare or the social safety net), I realize that I must stand corrected. When I said, “more of the same,” what we shall see instead is the *intensification* of these various policies, trends, omissions, because, safely reelected, Obama is emboldened to execute a course of market fundamentalism at home in all its gross inequalities (a regressive tax base, subsidies to favored sectors and corporations, among government’s probusiness functions under his leadership), and in the interrelated fields of defense and foreign policy, a new gusto in embracing technology to achieve lethality and conquer markets. Who would have known, 2004-2008, that he would somersault from left to right always, and always land on his feet, until winding up in a position on the political-ideological spectrum today called moderate or centrist only because the spectrum itself has tilted far rightward, and lopped off the left? Republicans make him look good by comparison, but objective criteria of societal welfare, such as economic democratization, the willingness to confront squarely long-term problems of climate change and natural-resources planning, and a foreign policy accommodative to the aspirations and needs of others, make him look, in each and every case, a dismal failure if not worse.

The day is January 8, moments away from the Inaugural, an ordinary day by most standards, yet the next day, three items from *The New York Times* grabbed my attention, prompting one of my favorite pastimes, writing Comments to the paper, hoping, wholly unrealistically, that I might stimulate discussion of issues through an alternative framework from that which is generally offered. *Times* groupies, like myself, know the paper does not accept criticism kindly; for me, and perhaps others, failure to publish a Comment is a sure sign that I had struck a nerve, did something very right, which proved unassimilable, while routine acceptance seldom toppled any columns (excuse the pun, not intended). Here then are three which, I am ashamed to say, were all accepted (unlike several others during the week), and which I have chosen to signify three “moments” in the Obama administration’s policy making, that is, areas of considerable or potential importance. which point to a future—the Second Term—darker than the admittedly dark days we’re presently going through.

The first, where *The Times* is at its best, and deserves commendation, that is, an editorial which recognizes a problem and meets it between one-half and two-thirds of the way, staying clear, as usual, of demanding that Obama be held accountable for what is here a clear case of anti- or nonregulation (euphemistically, “self-regulation”) rather than independent government authority backed by law *and* criminal penalties, to oversee and prevent abuses in the financial industry’s mortgage and foreclosure practices. The editorial, “Another Slap on the Wrist,” criticizes the “illegal foreclosure practices” of the banks, and the regulators delay in stepping in to pronounce the self-review process inadequate. Bravo, because it writes: “If it’s timely review they [regulators] wanted, they would not have instituted the deeply flawed review process in the first place, nor would they have let the sham reviews drag on for more than a year. Worse, the settlement amount is inadequate.” The remedy? Still no word about the responsibility of the Obama administration, merely an “independent monitor” for overseeing “antiforeclosure aid” and asking the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which Obama savaged from the start, to draw up rules. [NYT, 1/9/12]

Excellent description of the problem, yet inadequate in conceptualization and remedial action. Self-regulation has been essentially the American Way since T. Roosevelt’s Bureau of Corporations (1903), a wholly misleading mode of regulation if by that term is meant, a framework of law and

constituted authority, as it should, whose purpose is to enforce principles of control in the PUBLIC INTEREST, not that of the industry or other body presumably to be controlled. Self-regulation in fact is a sweetheart arrangement legitimated and winked at (for its abuses), what NYT correctly calls “a wrist slap,” by a compliant government working not for the people but rather for throwing a shield of protection around that which is to be regulated to ensure its continued questionable behavior.

Self-regulation historically represents therefore the interpenetration of government and business (including, of course, the financial sector as well), which is just a scholarly and/or polite way of saying, deregulation per se, so that independent control is neither wanted nor permitted. It is a hoax, and The Times must here put the ball more squarely in the Obama administration’s corner for its generalized lack of regulatory commitment. Even CFPB, which you pin your hopes on, was weakened from Day One when Obama marginalized Elizabeth Warren, its creator, from assuming directorship, just as it marginalized, also early, Paul Volcker from banking reform. Obama does not want effective regulation.

The second, an article by reporters Perlroth and Hardy, ably describes the recent cyberwarfare attacks on US online banking sites, more serious than previously because, “instead of exploiting individual computers, the attackers engineered networks of computers in data centers,” revealing a greater degree of sophistication and maximizing the impact of the interruptions. It is believed, but not established, that the attacks originated from Iran—for which Obama’s national security staff is understandably angered and alarmed, not, of course, conceding the obvious, that John Brennan started the whole cyberwarfare round by *first* initiating an attack on the computers of the Iranian nuclear research facility, the same Brennan now famous for “enhanced interrogation,” the president’s most trusted adviser on counterterrorism, geopolitical strategy, and founder, patron saint, and ideologue for the armed drone for targeted assassination, and nominee for head of CIA. None of this reflects well on Obama, from approval of an escalation of cyberwarfare tactics, incorporating them in fact into a broader strategy which rests upon the reliance of paramilitary forces and armed drones, ostensibly in advancing the “war on terror,” but actually a geopolitical outreach to have a greater Middle East presence and, globally, warn and/or counter real and imagined adversaries, to, once again, the importance attached to the advice of the everpresent Brennan—or should I say, Svengali? [NYT, 1/9/12]

More power to the Iranians. When the US engages in criminal activity, of course there shall be blowback—and deservedly so. The paternity for cyberwarfare against Iran’s nuclear site is John O. Brennan, chief adviser to Pres. Obama, & now nominated to CIA directorship (while probably still having Obama’s ear)—the same Brennan who has consistently lied about civilian casualties as a result of armed drones for targeted assassination. Since drone technology is not rocket-science (pardon the pun), how soon will the US find other nations using armed drones against America when the next intervention rolls around? Only psychopaths hit below the belt when weapons development is already so sophisticated. I hope we are taught a lesson, so that when we finally stop (because the price is too high), then the world can catch its breath, and diplomatic truly trump military solutions. With Brennan in place, Obama reveals the destructiveness at the base of his character and thinking.

In the third piece, David Sanger, the paper’s Crown Prince of political analysis, sets the appropriate tone for *The Times*’s authoritative place in both the newsgathering world and, more

immediately important, the White House Press Corps—the group of elite reporters vying with each other for *access* to high level officialdom, and, in turn, are skillfully played off against each other, thereby ensuring there would be a selective process of partiality based on the favorable treatment shown the administration. This does not question the integrity of reporters, so much as it reveals the subtlety of the manipulation and their dependence on a loaded system if they are to gather the news. I suspect Sanger is a step above the fray, given the White House’s desire to cultivate *The Times* as an influential opinion-molder; yet, granting his entire convictions in the matter, his thinking resonates to a remarkable degree with official policy, as can be seen in his introductory comment that, “[W]ith the selection of a new national security team,” Kerry at State, Hagel at Defense, Brennan at the CIA, this is a group “deeply suspicious of the wisdom of American military interventions around the world....” When I was a kid, we called that a “snow job,” according to Webster’s, “an intensive effort at persuasion or deception,” and although I don’t know whether or not the phrase is used today, what we have here is expected but objectionable, as the willing suspension of critical insight or dereliction of duty. I’m glad Sanger casts “intervention” in plural form, but the renunciation itself—yes, its streamlining (Robert McNamara’s more-bang-for-the buck Vietnam War military thinking, back in vogue) and changing guise (for what else is armed drone- and cyber-warfare and the continued establishment of military bases to conduct these and paramilitary operations but *intervention?*), but no, this is one leopard that does not change its spots. America without intervention would not only strip diplomatic history textbooks of most of their pages, but make the nation unrecognizable to itself and others. Thus, Sanger helps us usher in a new era of *groupthink*, in which moderation prevails, intervention fails the test of cost-benefit analysis, and a serene cloud settles over 1400 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Gone, he writes, is the old team of hawks, and now Brennan, “who helped devise the ‘light footprint’ [the presently fashionable phrase for the supposed turn to moderation] strategy of limiting American interventions, whenever possible, to drones, cyberattacks and Special Operations forces,” steps forward as the *eminence grise* of what I described in a previous *CounterPunch* article as the new dispensation—to me a somewhat horrifying thought, in which he enjoys, by *Times*’ reports, the ear of the president more than other advisers, his famous “playbook” in hand, together with Obama modernizing the whole schema of US global ascendance to register swifter, more efficient, more terrifying force on any who stand in the way. For Sanger, inexplicably, “drones, cyberattacks and Special Operations forces” are the salutary wave of the future—perhaps what I had in mind without quite realizing when I called attention in previous references to liberal fascism. We are to be congratulated because Doctor Strangelove has not been given a Cabinet post, and the US has not thus far threatened a Nuclear Holocaust if we don’t have our way. Sanger continues the preceding quotation, “All [Kerry, Hagel, Brennan] are advocates of those low-cost, low-American-casualty tools [i.e., drones, etc.], and all have sounded dismissive of attempts to send thousands of troops to *rewire* [my italics, watch it!, a new entrant in Pentagon jargonize] foreign nations as wasteful and ill-conceived.” So, intervention is not abandoned after all, and instead we now merely rewire foreign nations, i.e., interfere with, rearrange, and/or control their internal affairs to suit ourselves, but of course at cheaper cost. This moderation may then be described as liberalism-on-the-cheap, the moderation and the liberalism, however, subject to qualification along what I believe to be fascist lines because the hierarchical structure, including business consolidation, government-business interpenetration, and, increasingly, their systemic integration with militarization as the unifying glue of the social order, has not been changed, and, under Obama, rather, intensified.



Finally, Sanger, the inveterate insider, deserves credit for an insight here, although it flatly contradicts all reference to moderation, namely, that the new team, marking the supposedly major internal shift in national-security policy will, with these appointees, contribute to a decision-making process which will be White-House centered: “[The three] are likely to accommodate themselves, in ways their predecessors often did not, to a White House that has insisted on running national security policy from the West Wing.” This is a gem. I think Sanger knows whereof he speaks, and he here makes clear what observers have failed to notice through all of the alleged compromises with Republicans (I say “alleged” because I don’t see them as compromises but rather as his adoption of conservative policies, from the inadequacy of job creation to the abrogation of civil liberties to the weakness of the regulatory system to the emphasis on military power, positions therefore that his supporters see as compromises because they had been originally hoodwinked by the promises of ‘08 or, even partly for that reason, find comfort in their state of deep denial, but which he favored from the outset and—in the infamous ritual, probably the product of public relations, of negotiating with himself—went through the motions to disguise. It is better to be thought a compromiser—with fawning attention to his sweet reasonableness and desire to unite the red and black states—than a con artist, self-promoter, careerist, or narcissistic, psychologically fragile, dissimulating figure of, despite an urge to power, and relatedly, payback to his inner demons, somewhat undistinguished proportions. To what, then, did Sanger call attention which most of us, on the mistaken characterization of Obama as unprepared for or ill-suited to the hurley-burley of political negotiation, and hence, in his character, disposed to reconciliations of all sorts, missed? The opposite—a centralization of power, as in the enlargement of executive authority, free to adopt a policy course of his own choosing, now tilted heavily to military aggrandizement embodied in the reliance on, and, I suspect, pleasure he derives from, drone warfare, “collateral damage” and all, as well as the way he has repelled efforts at government transparency. But psychology is less important than actuality. [NYT, 1/9/12]

I beg to disagree with Mr. Sanger about the light footprint, in general—given the huge military budget, the “pivot” from Europe to Asia, and esp. the Pacific-first strategy itself (as in NDAA provisions for supercarriers and littoral craft) with an eye to the containment qua isolation of China. The Obama foreign policy IS aggressive, in regard to great-power geopolitical strategy. But beyond in general, Mr. Sanger truly neglects the in particular: John Brennan. I am not persuaded that armed drones for targeted assassination leaves or creates a light footprint. Brennan, as Obama’s chief adviser (which will not change when he goes to CIA) is, I believe, a war criminal. Period. You may refuse to publish because of that assertion. Fine. But the record is clear: despite Brennan’s consistent denial of civilian casualties, yes, including children, the program is a moral affront to rule of law and democratic governance. The Stanford-NYU report, “Living Under Drones,” is one of several authoritative findings, which include second strikes on funerals and first responders. Brennan’s cyberwarfare, which, as in today’s Times, shows playing with fire—i.e., blowback—, is frosting on the cake of his fascistic tactics. Why Mr. Sanger views the CIA-Spec. Ops PARAMILITARY approach as a light footprint, in view, e.g., of the world system of airstrips for drone launchings, needs explanation. Obama’s team, new or old, will continue Tuesday night hit-list merriment in murderous glee.

*Times* groupies, again like me, revolt, break your chains, you have nothing to lose but... the companion to your breakfast roll and coffee. Fight back. Insist the oft-repeated principle be honored in practice: “Speak truth to power.” It is an honest and convincing standard, violated through

currying favor with advertisers, etc., and remains more than ever the underpinning of a free press. By that token, *The Times* has been seriously remiss in its obligation, not just to its readers, but the society and, given its reach, the world. In this case, Obama has been allowed to escape not only serious criticism, but the demand that he be held accountable for policies pointing in every direction injurious to the achievement and maintenance of a democratic system of government. In this article, I have taken a single day, geared to the reporting of the preceding day's events—not Pearl Harbor, not Hiroshima, not the Kennedy or King assassinations, but an ordinary day—covered by *The Times* in a fairly straightforward way, yet showing Obama, however far from its intentions, as up to his neck in wrongdoing, not personal corruption, but policy making which, either by commission or omission, is the falsification of the trust a presumably democratic nation places in its leadership. We start with banking regulation, or the lack thereof, and the broken homes and broken bodies resulting from despicable mortgage practices still largely extant, themselves mere surface for the absolute failure of the nation's regulatory framework, apparatus, and independent execution, all to be laid at the president's door, both for *not* demanding enforcement of his own executive departments and agencies, and *not* formulating principles, standards, groundrules to achieve the public welfare. Which is worse here, SEC or FDA in doing the people's business—frankly, a toss-up? We then turn to cyberwarfare, which opens a real can of worms, or better, snakes, a vile eliciting messing-around, sabotage on a grand scale, with or into other peoples' affairs, and itself prompting a mental-set wherein anything goes: Why not, by the same logic, and minds, from the president down, which finds it appealing, *assassination*? The wish here is father to the act, as, of course, in the use, and whole purpose, of the armed drone. Obama, and this is what is meant by the centralization of power and authority in the White House, or Executive Power in general, is personally responsible for cyberwarfare, a major decision, especially in light of its retributive consequences, whether or not he signs a specific order. In the third case, the entire posture of the United States in its foreign relations is at stake, the "lighter footprint" changing nothing fundamental about the historical pattern of expansion, the articulation of doctrines and their translation into practice which favor unilateralism in ordering the global system of monetary, trade, and investment activities, and the resort to military implementation of America's hegemonic aspirations. Obama, like most previous presidents, takes hegemony and unilateralism as articles of faith—that is how we confer the honor of statesmen on our leaders—but it is hardly what many of us expected, perhaps we might include the Nobel Committee for the Peace Prize here, a warrior verging on if not already qualifying (as I think he *does*) for the status of war criminal, in which the full record of drone strikes, including secondary strikes on funerals and first responders, amply testifies. *The Times* in its investigative reporting has contributed admirably to that record, but its editorial page and now Sanger have failed to catch up. Apparently, Obama has little to worry about. He is not Herbert Hoover hiding behind the curtain, watching, as the Army forcibly ejected the Bonus Marchers from the Washington flats. Instead, he is his affable self, successfully—on most occasions—masking his tensions, as he meanwhile turns the screws on the American people and anyone else within reach, knowing he will never be held accountable for his failed presidency, never be found out. Period.

JANUARY 15, 2013

## America in the Crosshairs

It would be tempting to blame the NRA for the impasse over the control of gun violence. Obstructionist surely, it possesses political muscle in Congressional circles similar to that of Norquist's No-tax-increase pledge, as though "gun rights" shares equal place in the American Decalogue with property rights, which is a somewhat bawdry interpretation of the Constitution on both counts. The NRA would seem to have America in its cross-hairs. Why, though, should the nation—and its political leadership—be enthralled by its patriotic claptrap, including its defense of the Second Amendment? No-one applauded the efforts of civil-liberties groups, much less showed interest in, or helped to defend on constitutional grounds, victims of McCarthyism, when the *Fifth* Amendment was torn to shreds before our eyes. It comes down to whose ox is gored. The Left, nary a murmur; the Right, not unlike letting loose the bulls of Pamplona.

Sorry, but the NRA is merely shorthand for deepseated Reaction; it is al Qaeda with an American accent, capable of striking sheer terror into the body politic, yet far more perversive of the nation's foundations than all the work of terrorists combined. Is the statement too controversial? I wonder whether a truly democratized America, particularly one having a foreign policy without a global system of military bases, a record of habitual intervention and counterrevolution in order to ensure the political stabilization of the world's trade-and-investment activities compatible with US interests, would have attracted Muslim and Arab opposition and hostility to the same degree, if at all. Add to that the US intimidatory posture, warning all nations, as integral to Cold War international politics, first, the Soviet Union, now, China, not to mount ideological-cultural claims which challenge or are viewed as antithetical to the structure and values of American-defined and –sanctioned capitalism. Given the actuality of unilateralism, the complexity of alliance systems, and the centrality of oil affecting the other two, would America still have been a target on the world stage if it had pursued a more accommodative historical course? Violence breeds violence. We entered, actually decades ago, the world of blowback, retribution (on earth, not in heaven), or simply comeuppance, for our gargantuan appetites and the treatment of nonindustrialized nations.

Why then even mention the NRA? Despite a purported membership of 2.5 million, they are a surface indicator, a social phenomenon of a political culture, which points to underlying authoritarian traits, from xenophobia, ethnocentrism, rigidly-maintained defense mechanisms preventing introspection and self-criticism (The American Way, code for the hierarchical structuring and militarization of American capitalism), to a worship of power and, though sanitized and channeled into the world of *sport*, a cult of violence. Unrestrained capitalism has made a mishmash of human values, rule of law, respect for the poor, the disadvantaged, those rendered powerless, so that "democracy" itself has been transvalued into extreme individualism, the renunciation of social obligation, and that which we currently place on a pedestal—gun rights. Strip the Emperor of his clothes, and we find the prototypical neofascist clinging desperately to an identity which masks, even from himself, his inner nihilism. Did Newtown shake him up? Did it penetrate the thick walls of Obama's psyche—crocodile tears in locus, while murdering far more children than gun violence could ever account for, in his signature campaign of armed drones for targeted assassination?

I am old enough to remember the Butcher of Buchenwald, although, thank goodness, I was never in a death camp. But now I fear—for America's sake and its future—the Butcher(s) of the Beltway.

I do not exaggerate, not that the Holocaust is comparable *yet* to what in the near-term one can expect from the rightward shift of the political-ideological spectrum, projections of either structural tendencies or trends in political leadership, and concerns about the social peace as inequalities of wealth and power continue to widen and intensify, but rather I believe Obama and Brennan, *our* butchers, their geopolitical vision of a drone-saturated methodology of undisputed hegemony intact, can work greater harm in international politics than we've seen since JFK. (I choose Kennedy to be deliberately provocative, because I want to see altogether fresh thinking about his nuclear diplomacy, counterrevolutionary efforts in Latin America and the Third World generally, and, like Obama, his ability to clothe conservative doctrines and policies in liberal glitter.) This drone business borders on, if not already crossing the line to, a sadomasochism so unworthy and unspeakable in the upper reaches of government that, however hidden from view by the imperatives—self-declared by Obama—of the National Security State, it should have aroused the wrath of a now narcotized, spineless American public willing indeed anxious to turn a blind eye to a successive record of atrocities in the name of fighting terrorism. We cannot face the commission of criminal acts done also in the name of promoting freedom.

Here I come to the nub of the matter. The NRA is an excrescence of the wider political culture. Its goals and tactics would be seen as puerile, easily countered, were there political will to stand upright for the achievement of a social order founded on principles of peace and justice, not as *words* but structurally inscribed and demonstrably realized in the culture, values, and condition of the people. Yet that exactly flies in the face of a corporate framework which, had that vision been realized, must renounce its most cherished attributes: hierarchy, toughness (toward those viewed as weaker), and, now perhaps more than ever, militaristic, to reinforce patterns of social discipline and the mentality of *looking upward* for guidance in public policy, economic growth (trickle-down wealth creation), all decisions affecting foreign policy and the determination of war and peace. Teachers in Texas would not be undergoing instruction in the use of firearms, guns would not be brought into the national parks, and children in Pakistan would not be evaporated, because a president, poring over *hit lists*, makes a determination, then transmitted to a “pilot” in an air-conditioned sanctuary 8,000 miles from the target who presses the lever, and the child, possibly in the same car (often of targets not identified) or walking on the street, becomes, the most hated phrase I know, “a blood spat.”

That Obama dares to nominate John Brennan as CIA director is a grave insult to moral decency (whether or not the public condescends to raise an eyebrow), and speaks volumes about Obama's moral vacuity, which itself is becoming more evident with each passing day. And we've had four years of it, as social policy withers, environmental spoliation is unchecked, civil liberties drowned in the unctuous blather of the state secrets doctrine (i.e., the use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers), unionization rolled back, surveillance magnified—why continue, one gets the picture. Or does one? Brennan, war-criminal material, nevertheless is acknowledged to be Obama's closest adviser. And Obama himself? On Terror Tuesdays he sits down with his national-security advisers, his baseball-card-like hit lists to be discussed, playing God, the juices no doubt working, as one who holds whole areas of the world in a state of terror, lest an UAV descends from the sky on a mission of human obliteration. No POTUS to my knowledge has ever played such a *direct* role in authorizing the death of others. This seems a personal thing with him, and his sidekick, Brennan, still does not admit the existence of civilian casualties. Why should he? He has the weight and prestige of the government behind him. He also has Obama's cunning redefinition of the combatant

as being all males of military age (broadly conceived)—the beautiful and the damned alike; and if wives and children get in the way, then presumably they are fellow travellers or otherwise deserving. I do not exaggerate. The evidence is overwhelming. And if the “collateral damage” which comes from the designated strikes isn’t enough, there are also the *second* strikes directed at funerals and first responders, premeditated murder being the nicest way I can put it.

Thus, we have a context from which to work toward the analysis of gun violence, and the reason the NRA enjoys the success that it does. Americans, beginning with the president, for we are looking at a framework in which political-cultural cues are transmitted from the *top* downward through both major parties, appear inured, desensitized, ultimately, habituated, to violence. Gun violence is legitimated, allowed to go unchecked, because of the widely-subscribed value placed on equating social restraint on individual conduct with impermissible checks on freedom of action. Whether my gun buttresses feelings of manhood and sexual prowess in me, is a testimony to my liberty as a free American, provides a fictive equality which takes me beyond narrow class boundaries, or—the rationalizations are as unlimited as a fertile and furtive mind can concoct, the important point is that the gun-obsession is rooted in a dense ideological atmosphere saturated with compensatory themes and values in which the individual, denied a meaningful personhood, desperately seeks to fill the void, the emptiness, with the electrical charge he or she no longer feels. Guns are the antidote to numbness, the surrogate for acts of heroism. Take away my gun, I become a nonperson, prey to nightmarish creatures of the deep, left without protection. Sadomasochism above is met by paranoia below, they intermix, leaving a diluted form of each spread with varying proportions throughout the social order. The obsession with guns becomes thinkable *and* tolerable because it fills a need, apparently unique to America, as evidenced by its comparative absence in other advanced industrial countries. Armed teachers—packing on your next trip to the mall or the supermarket—making the worship of guns a National Gun Holiday (mark your calendars, 1/19/13), all of these are signs of a societal decadence to which, if further confirmation were needed, we are oblivious.

From the top down. A nation which promotes the use of force and executes, by presidential direction, its application in ways that violate international law, sets—to say the least—a bad example at home. How can Obama push for effective gun control when he does not have clean hands? For by his order there has been a promiscuous use of weaponry, all the time increasing in lethality, as with the next generation of nuclear bombs reputed to be in the pipeline, and for now, supercarriers to confront China. I say unclean hands when it comes to effective gun control, not only because he is favorably disposed to all things military (which sets up an incipient mental conflict of interest), but also because he consciously disfavors such control, as is the case with fundamental reforms of every description, from the regulation of the financial and business systems to rearguard holding actions with respect to climate change. His procrastination is not merely temperamental, it is ideologically driven. This can be seen by an article in *The New York Times* (1/11/13), by Michael Shear and Peter Baker, entitled “Tough Path Seen by Obama on Ban of Assault Weapons,” so devastating as to call forth protests from the White House and an article in the *Washington Post* largely defending the Administration.

We see Obama in true form: a pretend-vacillation, in which he almost invariably starts by anticipating defeat, so that, the reality here, he then proposes halfway, ineffectual measures pleasing to those who are subject to the regulations—and probably corresponding with his own conservative

stance. This is called “pragmatism” or “realism,” but looks to me, rather, as his being devoid of conviction and always anxious to court popularity—the conservatism representing opportunism more than specific choices in public policy. Foreign policy seems another matter (the centralization of decision-making in the White House), but on gun control, a feigned modesty, essentially, Please Congress, do allow us some cosmetics (i.e., cover) at home—*not*, the banning of assault weapons, but, ah, background checks. The reporters write in careful, neutral language: “...the White House has calculated that a ban on military-style assault weapons will be exceedingly difficult to pass through Congress and is focusing on other measures *it deems more politically achievable*.” (Italics, mine) Specifically, gun checks “and the need for more research on gun violence.” And when Biden let slip “limits on the purchase of high-capacity magazines,” in his own extended public remarks, “he made no mention of curbing the production and sale of assault weapons.” Still, with apprehension about being pinned-down by anything specific, the reporters state, “A spokesman for Mr. Obama said later in the afternoon that the vice-president’s remarks merely reflect a desire for a broad approach to gun violence.” To be sure, the broader the approach, the less depth or specificity—and the less likely of anything efficacious being done.

Gun rights. Why not *people* rights? Guns are carcinogenic; they are creating a political culture of force and deceit that is eating away at our vitals. Let this continue, and rather than worry about fiscal cliffs, we can start worrying about the fascist precipice. I say then, “America in the Cross-Hairs,” because, not NRA, but we ourselves, by allowing the Butcher(s) of the Beltway to define the tone of national life, backed by actions which disgrace the moral standards openly professed and, in essence, underwrite, any meaningful democratic society, proceed to shoot ourselves, no longer in the leg but through the heart.

JANUARY 22, 2013

### **Obama, Round Two**

I have written comments to the *New York Times* for several years, prompted to bear down in a sustained way in the lead-up to Obama’s First Term, when it appeared obvious that early that—especially with the announcement of his appointments—he would betray every promise that he made in the ’08 campaign. I will not go into detail here (and rather concentrate on the three weeks before his new term), but his treachery became so apparent, as on health care, that I was alerted to expect the worst. He did not disappoint. Even from the start, Obama was facing upward—the absence of authentic banking and financial regulation—abjectly serving and servicing a political economy of unrestrained wealth, and, at the same time, looking downward, looking to tear down the social safety net, turn a blind eye to mortgage foreclosures and, equally, provide *nothing* in the way of job creation.

Like others, I initially ascribed this to a failure of will, or nerve, not yet realizing that his compromises, and use of Republican obstructions, as a crutch for self-pity and the implied promise of doing better when the spirit of bipartisanship plugs in, were in fact a sign of accommodation to, and soon, wholehearted acceptance of, that which we were led to believe he strongly opposed. So, *no*, compromise is a fraud; he actually wants the substantive results, from market fundamentalism to intensified wealth inequality, from environmental degradation to the extreme claims of secrecy and abrogation of civil liberties, from the steady infusion of militarism into popular culture to the much-

despised armed drones for targeted assassination—and the list goes on, is compounded, becomes uglier by the day.

I am presently writing about drones, but suffice it to say, we have a president who personally authorizes assassination—by all accounts *vaporizing* human beings from control stations 8,000 miles away, his most trusted adviser, John O. Brennan, at his ear, a new nomination inaugurating the Second Term which elicits the contempt of humankind. Obama, if this can be said (for language is inadequate), has been in the process of pushing for not only the militarization of capitalism but also the militarization of the *military*, a neat trick that even Bush II has not attempted. First, the huge military budget, with new more sophisticated (i.e., lethal) weaponry in the pipeline, such as—under the rubric from New Start of “modernization”—the next generation of nuclear weapons; second, the Pacific-first strategy, with the rise of naval power, shored-up alliance systems, maneuvers, all to the effect of containing and isolating China (our new nemesis, replacing Russia, in the Cold War); third, the armed drone program, including a global system of airstrips to house them, and, not coincidentally, maintain a global intimidatory presence for purposes of equating counterterrorism with counterrevolution and, not far behind, trying desperately to remain the exclusive superpower guiding and benefiting from globalization, in a world of multipolar centers of power; and fourth (as with everything touching on Obama, there is always *more*, cloaked in secrecy by the alleged imperatives of national security dusted off and glamorized as The National Security State), the expansion of CIA functions, beyond its charter, now moving from intelligence to paramilitary operations, together with the Joint Special Ops Command, which, with the attention he lavishes on, and/or is dependent on, them, suggests either the excursion on a colossal ego-trip or the creation of a personal army (I say this not as conspiracy theory, but merely the building of mutual trust and mutual loyalties, for increasingly high-risk assignments). This is not a lovely picture. The Inauguration is coming in a matter of hours. I shall not be watching or listening.

The comments presented here to *The Times* cover a range of policies, which is surprising perhaps in what should be a calm before the festivities; they are addressed to news articles, editorials, and columnists or political analysts (Krugman, Sanger), and though I do not keep track, I’m proud to say that some have not been published—testimony, I believe, to saying things of which the paper does not approve (e.g., calling Brennan a war criminal, or using the phrase “liberal fascism,”), nonpublication constituting not sour grapes (I’ve had, according to those in the Public Editor’s office, when I complain of *censorship*, that my acceptance rate is over 95%) but eagerness both to keep mentally alert and stake out forward ground, in the hope that I might radicalize someone out there, even if by only a smidgen. Content addresses a wide range of topics—all in the last three weeks: the fiscal cliff, Chicago crime, the firing of a CIA member, rising health-insurance costs, economic recovery, Afghan withdrawal, the nominations of Hagel and Brennan, mortgage regulation, Iranian hacking, armed drones, climate change, and gun control. At all times, Obama is center stage or not far from my mind.

#### **[Obama tax compromise: favoring the wealthy, NYT, Jan. 1, 2013]**

The Times has provided a good analytic breakdown of the tax compromise, particularly by bringing out: (a) the \$450,000. level for actuation of an increase (the related article gives the exact sum, from 35% to 39.6%, which is hardly a decent increase; and (b) the phony victories—if we can even call them that—concerning the estate and capital gains taxes. (I might add that the phrase

“middle class,” with its upper limit of \$250,000, is a travesty, not only on defining social class, but an insult to & source of false consciousness for working people earning far less.)

Good show, but what is still needed is a systematic critique (or if that word is too strong when applied to Obama, then report or exposure will do), of how much he and his administration favored the wealthy. It's our own fault. We are still falling for the liberal gloss Obama applies to, not conservative, but out right reactionary policies, taxation being merely the topic du jour. Even on the “fiscal cliff,” I'm glad you mentioned the phrase “public investment,” but I hope you expand on that in future. Obama has, as far as I can see, two guiding economic principles: deregulation and privatization—both, a direct contribution of the much-vaunted, yet wholly undeserved, Clinton Administration, which gave us not only Robert Rubin, but also the axing of Glass-Steagall.

Obama and fellow Democrats would qualify for FDR's “economic royalists,” no better—no matter what Obama groupies will say—than the Republicans.

**[Fiscal cliff: from New Deal to Raw Deal, uncaring (bipartisan) political swampland, NYT, Jan. 2, 2013]**

What a way to start 2013, both major parties can be credited with a dismal performance, the Republicans for cruelly and inhumanely calling for “cuts” as a way of savaging the social safety net, the Democrats for selling out on traditional New-Deal principles, such as genuine progressiveness in the income tax structure. Peter Baker was incorrect yesterday in speaking of the “Left” within the Democratic party. There is no Left there or, with the exception of a few lone voices, anywhere in the major parties. It was nice to see Obama, golf clubs in tow, ready to resume his vacation, as meanwhile the American people have entered a new stage, from the New Deal to the RAW DEAL, where wealth, deregulation, privatization, armed drones for political assassination, all—together, for in reality they are inseparable, or singly—trump social decency, respect for the needs of the less fortunate among us, good old fashion fairness. 2013 will witness, precisely because of an uncaring political swampland inhabited by both parties, the beginning of decline, decline not least in its moral foundations, fast being eroded by the performance we see with respect to the fiscal situation. This mock-battle (neither side cares a penny for the poor, the unemployed, the foreclosed, those without adequate medical care) is just symptomatic on an inner condition of dry rot. More gun massacres, more homeless, welcome to 2013!

**[Blowback: moral bankruptcy of national leadership—the killing fields of Chicago, NYT, Jan. 3, 2013]**

Blowback. Granted blacks in Chicago are tearing each other apart, a mutual destructiveness that speaks volumes about a nation incapable of or unwilling to provide jobs (the mentality of privatization and market fundamentalism has made impossible and unthinkable the PUBLIC WORKS programs of the New Deal, where the youth and unemployed can develop pride for having made meaningful contributions to society). Blowback, then, on a collapsing of opportunity for the poor and minorities.

But blowback also because of the moral bankruptcy of national leadership. The Times reports shooting at funerals in Chicago. What about Obama's signature strikes by armed drones for targeted assassination? The Stanford-NYU report “Living Under Drones,” and the work of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have verified Obama's policy of attacking FUNERALS as well as first



responders in Pakistan and elsewhere. With examples like that, why be surprised at the killing fields in Chicago? It's time for political leaders to drop their cowardice about gun control at home and show, abroad, a US presence of genuine peace. Where is Dr. King when we most need him? America is, deservedly, because of its shortsighted greed at home, and aggression overseas, falling apart, and the black youngster in your photo is paying the price of fear and being robbed of a decent education and life. America has to straighten out, before violence on the South Side abates.

*[Reply to critic of previous comment: barbarous campaign of drone warfare, NYT, Jan. 3, 2013]*

Thanks walterrehett, I agree that, at first sight, the analogy or comparison may seem an analytic stretch, but think about it; (a) privatization prevents government programs of social reconstruction which could provide both meaningful work and a sense of group solidarity to troubled and rootless youth; and b) Obama hardly sets a good example for tranquility at home with his barbarous campaign of drone warfare—the first president doing hands-on assassination. His speech at Newtown surely was insincere, given that by his direct order, 162 children have already been killed by his drones. As a nation we are failing on both levels: domestic solutions to critical problems, and foreign violations of law, due process, and much more.

**[Obama and abridgement of civil liberties: CIA firing—secrecy, suppression of war crimes (?) NYT, Jan.5, 2013]**

Mr. Kiriakou's case exemplifies the dangers of the National Security State as intensified under the Obama presidency. Only recently have criticisms been acknowledged to be warranted, so completely has Obama been given a free pass—and his supporters still refuse to admit how far civil liberties have been abridged and/or violated during his rule. Example: He has invoked the Espionage Act at least six times against whistleblowers, more than all previous presidents combined. The obsession with secrecy is nearing paranoid proportions, as witness that surrounding the armed drone program for targeted assassination.

Shane Scott's reporting, always informative, adds a further twist: When he writes, "one of an UNPRECEDENTED (my caps) string of six prosecutions under President Obama for leaking information to the news media," he is giving the nation a wake-up call to how greatly intent Obama is to maintain an iron curtain around policy making. Why the extreme secrecy? Common sense suggests one wants secrecy because there is something to hide. The Obama people are walking a fine line, knowing that they are on the edge of if not over their heads in war crimes. This present prosecution is ill-advised and gratuitous, indicating that things are spinning out of control.

Even your adjoining piece on former Gen. MacChrystal indicates overreach—Obama goes for the jugular against anyone who crosses him. MacChrystal, like Kiriakou, both, victims of a paranoid president.

**[Rise in Insurance Costs: Obama's record of nonachievement, NYT, Jan. 6, 2013]**

Of course, the rise in insurance rates! If "one of the biggest objectives of the Obama administration's health care law was to stem the rapid rise on insurance costs for consumers," he would have FOUGHT for the single-payer system, even if only as an opening gambit, and then pushed for the PUBLIC OPTION. Instead, he did neither.

I am so sick and tired of hearing about Republican intransigence to explain away the Obama record of nonachievement. His base in its deep denial and in its stonewalling of all criticisms, exhibits classic symptoms of transference—projecting on to him all their fantasies and hopes. It is time to grow up.

I say “of course,” about insurance premiums, because if you go back to the early White House Health Summit, the picture is clear. All dissident voices were kept out; it was a love feast for health insurers (promised exemption from antitrust prosecution) and Big Pharma. Meanwhile, Physicians for Social Responsibility started picketing the White House in scrubs—a major embarrassment to the regime, and so two were admitted, on condition that they remain silent.

Enlarge your gaze. Health insurance? the same for bank regulation. the same for climate change. the same for the entire defense industry. Sorry, I no longer care whether NYT prints criticisms of Obama, but the man is an imposter, one who betrayed every promise from the '08 campaign and in '12 had little to offer but unctuous platitudes, including on gun control and now signing NDAA.

**[Economic recovery: privatization—a closed economy (Krugman), *NYT*, Jan. 7, 2013]**

Prof. Krugman unintentionally reveals the bankruptcy (of ideas) of modern capitalism, when he writes, “my spending is your income; your spending is my income.” Two things are immediately wrong with the formulation; a) it is too confining, as though an hermetically-sealed economy—a la zero-sum game—in which economic activity must work within those confines, and b) spending per se tells us nothing, for what must be asked is: what kind of spending, and, of course, on what? A society avoiding depression through conspicuous consumption and the production of ersatz goods, is not one I'd choose to live in, nor would it, or perhaps could it, ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the obviation of social tensions.

I think the cross Prof. Krugman must bear—which he seems gladly to do—is privatization, which itself poisons the atmosphere, as in the US, against government expenditures (the very solution for recovery he, correctly, recommends), but, tying them (“while the private sector regains its balance”) as he does to narrow-gauged solutions will get us nowhere.

America suffers because of its ideological rigidity. Once upon a time, seemingly long ago, there was FDR and the New Deal; there was direct government employment; there was direct government spending on the improvement of infrastructure, reforestation, and not least, the conservation of human skills, through e.g., WPA and CCC. From my vantage point, what he recommends is paltry in comparison.

**[Afghan withdrawal: unilateral dominance in shaping global stabilization (ed.), *NYT*, Jan.7, 2013]**

The Times deftly sidesteps the elephant in the room, the big question: Why are we there in the first place? A wholly needless war which leaves its indelible mark: US intervention has no rational basis, except within the framework of geopolitical strategy, itself flawed because predicated—still to this day—on unilateral dominance in shaping global stabilization, for purposes of advantageous trade-and-investment opportunities. A lot of people, on both sides of this tragic, misguided conflict have died—for what?

Militarism has become a US knee-jerk assertion to practically everything, a good in itself, regardless of the havoc wrought, including the distortion of the American economy leading to the savaging of the social safety net. It is time to leave, and to cut our psychological losses. Like Vietnam, the US has lost the Afghan war, however much it is politically and ideologically necessary to disguise and invert that truth.

Instead of playing the numbers game, whether 3,000, or 9,000, or 60,000, hardly matters—the moral flooring here is plain zero.

**[Nomination of Hagel and Brennan: American fascism wears a liberal mask, *NYT*, Jan.7, 2013]**

On former-Sen. Hagel, I have no comment, except to say that the opposition against him, on Israel and Iran, is, I think, disgraceful. As a conservative Jew, I deplore the pressure being exerted by the “Jewish lobby,” yes, the “Jewish lobby.” That is what it is, and it has been uniformly on the side of reactionary politics—support of dictators, maneuvering the US into war situations, demanding 1000% commitment to Israel, no matter what egregious things it has done—to the Palestinians, to Lebanon, etc.

As for John O. Brennan, no surprise there. Obama is conducting an illegal, highly immoral drone warfare which kills indiscriminately noncombatants, women, children—with Brennan his closest adviser, the two, in my humble opinion, WAR CRIMINALS. The Times dare not print this, but its national-security reporters, Savage, Shane, Mazzetti, etc., have written enough to warrant that indictment: a vicious war of, pure and simple, ASSASSINATION, Obama running true to form and Brennan, the first time, had to withdraw his name from the CIA directorship because of his support for waterboarding and other forms of TORTURE. The same Brennan who, in his speech to the Woodrow Wilson Center denied there were any civilian casualties—a baldface LIE which should disqualify him from consideration. But not in Obama’s book, who has now enlarged the CIA mission to include paramilitary operations.

American fascism wears a liberal mask. Put your reporters under wraps for telling the truth.

**[Nominations, II: Torture, paramilitary operations, armed drones—Guess on whose watch? (ed.), *NYT*, Jan. 8, 2013]**

A puerile editorial, to say the least, esp. the larger picture. NYT continues to whitewash Obama’s foreign and military policies. “Bloated” defense budget—guess on whose watch? Enlargement of CIA functions, from intelligence to paramilitary operations—guess on whose watch? Pacific-first strategy, with accompanying arms build-up (including supercarriers and littoral craft) all to surround, contain, isolate China—guess on whose watch? Most of all, the vicious, illegal, inhuman, Nazi-like (think of UAVs over London in WWII) armed drone program, the president of the US personally authorizing targeted assassination—guess on whose watch?

Yet NYT continues to apologize for Obama, and Brennan whispering in his ear. The Situation Room, Tuesday nights, baseball cards, hit lists—we are speaking here of war crimes, let me reiterate, war crimes, and NYT blithely passes over this. Perhaps muzzle Savage, Shane, Mazzetti, because they as investigative reporters, speak truth to power. NYT is complicit w/ its namypamby editorials. You worry about gay rights, most of the editorial. I worry about torture, waterboarding, rendition,

black holes, an out-of-control CIA, above all, a president w/ crocodile tears for Newtown, and his murder of 162 children in Pakistan alone—and this, an authoritative count, now surely outdated by more drone strikes.

Hagel may be better than Panetta, but how about more attention to AIPAC and the neocons, who have embroiled the US in unnecessary wars?

**[Mortgage regulation(?): self-regulation = deregulation—Obama opposes effective regulation (ed.), *NYT*, Jan. 9, 2013]**

Excellent description of the problem, yet inadequate in conceptualization and remedial action. Self-regulation has been essentially the American Way since T. Roosevelt's Bureau of Corporations (1903), a wholly misleading mode of regulation if by that term is meant, a framework of law and constituted authority, as it should, whose purpose is to enforce principles of control in the PUBLIC INTEREST, not that of the industry or other body presumably to be controlled. Self-regulation in fact is a sweetheart arrangement legitimated and winked at (for its abuses), what NYT correctly calls "a wrist slap," by a compliant government working not for the people but rather for throwing a shield of protection around that which is to be regulated to ensure its continued questionable behavior.

Self-regulation historically represents therefore the interpenetration of government and business (including, of course, the financial sector as well), which is just a scholarly and/or polite way of saying, deregulation per se, so that independent control is neither wanted nor permitted. It is a hoax, and The Times must here put the ball more squarely in the Obama administration's corner for its generalized lack of regulatory commitment. Even CFPB, which you pin your hopes on, was weakened from Day One when Obama marginalized Elizabeth Warren, its creator, from assuming directorship, just as it marginalized, also early, Paul Volcker from banking reform. Obama does not want effective regulation.

**[Cyberwarfare: Retaliation—only psychopaths hit below the belt, *NYT*, Jan. 9, 2013]**

More power to the Iranians. When the US engages in criminal activity, of course there shall be blowback—and deservedly so. The paternity for cyberwarfare against Iran's nuclear site is John O. Brennan, chief adviser to Pres. Obama, & now nominated to CIA directorship (while probably still having Obama's ear)—the same Brennan who has consistently lied about civilian casualties as a result of armed drones for targeted assassination. Since drone technology is not rocket-science (pardon the pun), how soon will the US find other nations using armed drones against America when the next intervention rolls around? Only psychopaths hit below the belt when weapons development is already so sophisticated. I hope we are taught a lesson, so that when we finally stop (because the price is too high), then the world can catch its breath, and diplomatic truly trump military solutions. With Brennan in place, Obama reveals the destructiveness at the base of his character and thinking.

**[The "light footprint"(?): armed drones, paramilitary operations, hit-list merriment (Sanger), *NYT*, Jan. 9, 2013]**

I beg to disagree with Mr. Sanger about the light footprint, in general—given the huge military budget, the "pivot" from Europe to Asia, and esp. the Pacific-first strategy itself (as in NDAA

provisions for supercarriers and littoral craft) with an eye to the containment qua isolation of China. The Obama foreign policy IS aggressive, in regard to great-power geopolitical strategy. But beyond in general, Mr. Sanger truly neglects the in particular: John Brennan. I am not persuaded that armed drones for targeted assassination leaves or creates a light footprint. Brennan, as Obama's chief adviser (which will not change when he goes to CIA) is, I believe, a war criminal. Period. You may refuse to publish because of that assertion. Fine. But the record is clear: despite Brennan's consistent denial of civilian casualties, yes, including children, the program is a moral affront to rule of law and democratic governance. The Stanford-NYU report, "Living Under Drones," is one of several authoritative findings, which include second strikes on funerals and first responders. Brennan's cyberwarfare, which, as in today's Times, shows playing with fire—i.e., blowback—, is frosting on the cake of his fascistic tactics. Why Mr. Sanger views the CIA-Spec. Ops PARAMILITARY approach as a light footprint, in view, e.g., of the world system of airstrips for drone launchings, needs explanation. Obama's team, new or old, will continue Tuesday night hit-list merriment in murderous glee.

**[Gun control: Obama devoid of conviction—fascist precipice, *NYT*, Jan.11, 2013]**

Reading between the lines, one finds from the article a paralysis of will, beginning with Obama (who always starts by anticipating defeat, largely, I think, because he is devoid of conviction and prefers conservative stances as the way to court popularity) and transmitted downward through BOTH major parties.

NRA is al Qaeda with an American accent, far more perversive of the nation's foundations than all the work of terrorists combined. Yet we stand powerless as our children continue to be murdered. And our leadership is complicit because standing by without a clue about how to stop this creeping menace. Instead, Obama sets a bad example by nominating John BRENNAN as CIA director, signaling that from the highest authority in the US it is o.k. to murder children in Pakistan via armed drones for targeted assassination, but please, Congress, do allow us some cosmetics at home (i.e., background checks).

Guns are carcinogenic; they are creating a political culture of force and deceit that is eating away at our vitals. Let this continue, and rather than worry about fiscal cliffs, we can start worrying about the fascist precipice.

**[Climate change: Democrats meet Republicans—nothing from either (Krugman), originally published Nov. 23, 2012, *NYT*, Jan. 13, 2013]**

Sorry Prof. Krugman, America may already be on a path of inexorable decline. What you say about Sen. Rubio and creationists and the impact of Republican antiscience attitudes is 100% true. But two points; 1. recent studies of Republican authoritarianism are old hat. T.W. Adorno's "Authoritarian Personality" (1950) laid out a psychological paradigm of incipient fascism that even then corresponded to the beliefs and attitudes of large numbers of Americans. And 2. as always, you target Republicans and exempt liberals from your analysis (here one sentence) when in fact Obama has done NOTHING about climate change, or with his permissive oil drilling and heavy support of the nuclear power industry may actually have intensified global warming. The reactionary Republicans are met at least 80-90% of the way by the "moderate" Democrats, whether here or banking and financial regulation, environmental policy, gun control, and, most basic, huge defense spending, applause for the armed drone of targeted-assassination fame, and the list drags wearily

on. The Republicans can't face reality; neither can those who give Obama a clean bill of health. Perhaps the next stage of US historical development will be the new variant in social formations, liberal fascism.

**[Obama, gun control, assassination: contradiction—president's unclean hands (ed.), *NYT*, Jan. 17, 2013]**

You never ask the question, Why did Obama wait so long? Nor do you address the issue, how can he speak of gun control and the death of children, when his own program of armed drones for targeted assassination has murdered more children than all the gun deaths at home combined during his administration? I say, crocodile tears, unless and until he can express the same regret for the Pakistani and Somali children—also sacred human beings—VAPORIZED by his murderous program. All that was missing from the White House ceremony was John Brennan, presently his closest adviser, and known the world over as a supporter of torture. I'm sorry, but *NYT* again gives Obama a free pass, and doing so, fails to speak truth to power.

**[State laws rejecting gun controls: Obama a sham—armed drones and gun violence (ed.), *NYT*, Jan. 18, 2013]**

That pretty much does it: Turning pre-emption upside down in this mad dash to the bottom confirms my fears that a) a significant portion of America is turning fascist, b) N.R.A. is al Qaeda with an American accent, and c) the Obama administration, despite the public relations, is essentially feckless and doing little for gun control.

a) scratch a guns-rights advocate and you find a frightened nutjob hiding behind and/or openly displaying a massive supply of weapons for reasons he/she does not know, a pervasive fear of the bogeyman psychotic in etiology, based on a rich and confused mixture of racism, anticommunism, self-hatred, you name it.

b) N.R.A. has done more harm to America, including the # of gun deaths its propaganda has enabled, than al Qaeda ever did (or ever will), a cancer in our midst, and really, the institutionalization of (a) the nutjobs.

c) Obama is a sham on this issue. His personal hand in the program of armed drones for targeted assassination has killed more children than all the gun violence has done through his first term—and has now assassinated a total exceeding those killed in 9/11. When a leader has blood on his hands like that, why should anyone listen to his appeals for gun control?

Hypocrisy + incipient fascism = America circa 2013. Have a nice Inaugural!

**[Obama's gun-control announcement: why trust him now?—no action on *any* reform legislation, *NYT*, Jan. 19, 2013]**

Several points: a) the history of federal incorporation and other laws suggests that on progressive matters, when states act on their own against vested interests or for the public good (i.e., the New York legislation on gun control, which goes further than what Obama announced today), the federal government steps in with legislation which, the courts have held, SUPERSEDES state efforts, therefore weakening the whole thrust of effective regulation.

I'm sorry but I do not trust the Obama White House to do the right thing. Your report indicates little of substantive value beyond mere exhortation, and I'm certain that DOJ will find ways to invalidate the New York law when, by going allegedly too far, it proves an embarrassment to the federal government.

b) We need a full accounting of who supports the federal legislation, because lobbying is so efficient one suspects the NRA by taking an irrational, dangerous position, is creating a smokescreen so that anything however mild and ineffective will look good. Washington is not to be trusted. If there has been so little positive action on a tremendous range of issues, why should this be any different?

c) Obama's track record does not give grounds for confidence. Why did he wait this long on guns? Why the public relations and cosmetics—surrounded by children at the announcement—like being surrounded by military brass on other photo-op occasions? He hasn't worked hard on ANY reform legislation, why now, except for popularity?

JANUARY 28, 2013

**Obama as Daniel Boone**

The January 26 edition of the *New York Times* has three items relevant to the issue of gun control, an editorial pleading for the restoration of funds for the CDC for the study of gun violence, its argument being that this is really a public health problem; an article by Peter Baker, "Gun Control Advocates Need to Listen to Gun Owners," Obama's making of obeisance to the gunnies, their lobbies, the manufacturers, all who support the bastardization of the Constitution in this vital respect; and a second article, by Mike McIntire, on "Selling a New Generation on Guns," which portrays capitalism at its finest, gun manufacturers targeting (sorry for the pun) children, not simply to build a future progun constituency but actually have them become *active* gunnies, starting them off with magazines like "Junior Shooter," then getting them into gun "sports," as a step to full gun-embracement. I'm reminded as a kid of the tobacco companies during World War II boasting about sending cartons of cigarettes to the troops in the hospitals—a grand start, as with guns, to an addiction in harmful substances, bullets rather than cigs. (The Obama qua Daniel Boone reference in the subtitle, is my take, from the Baker piece, on Obama's praise of the wilderness experience, where men presumably are men, and guns—bless them—guns.)

Are we or are we not closing in on fascism when Obama cries buckets over Newtown (no, an overstatement; as good an actor as he is, that range of emotion cannot for him even be faked, as did the other one), and at the *same time* personally authorizing targeted assassinations which, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have killed, as a not that recent tabulation, 162 children, well more than all children killed in gun rampages during his presidency and for some time before? How can we expect gun control at home when we indifferently slaughter men, women, children, in Pakistan and Somalia? Why fascism? In part, because we, as a nation, are so indifferent to human life, except that of our own, and even then selectively applied. Why fascism? In part, because our indifference extends in all directions, the land, the atmosphere, the vast accumulations of wealth vacuumed-in under our noses, the contempt for Third World nations, the alacrity in building up a war machine and, as with Obama and his prized sidekick, John O. Brennan, constructing a foreign policy of permanent war—as though we need and must have an "enemy" to relieve our own

boredom and, more basic, unify us as a country. The lines of continuity between anticommunism and counterterrorism, are, to me, crystal clear, founded on the love of hating, as a prerequisite of glorifying own nationhood—and incidentally, giving a much-needed shot in the arm to American capitalism. If we have to have scapegoats, why not go one step further, beyond scapegoating, to the genuine article, the terrorist in our midst, beginning with Goldman and AIG executives, Sheldon Adelson and the purveyors, hiding under the casino tables, of unadulterated slime via nonaccountable secret organizations (I say that, not as a devotee of conspiracy theory, but again, from today's *Times*), and, one of my favorites, The Butcher of the Beltway (you may remember the similar moniker for a figure in World War II), John O. Brennan, confidante of Obama, and heightened-interrogation enabler of the first water?

I present here two Comments I wrote for the *Times*, the first (surprisingly) accepted, the second, an Addendum, or reply to myself, not, as of now, accepted.

## I.

I'm perplexed. Does The Times editorial board read the paper's articles? In the same issue, Peter Baker, "Gun Control Advocates Need to Listen to Gun Owners," we find Obama again, a left jab (gun control), then immediately tanking for the count of 10. A pathological dissimulator, and now, portraying himself as another Daniel Boone, not the pride in skeet shooting so much (pretty laughable), but paeans to an outdoor country life his speech writers may envision but one he certainly never experienced.

Under Obama, more gun rampages, more pious (i.e., crocodile) tears for the children-victims (itself blasphemy, for his armed drones have massacred more children than have the domestic rampages), more platitudes, not as compromises and cave-ins, but as outright deceptions, betrayals, as he servilely seeks the favor of reactionary forces in America.

As for your idea of treating "gun violence as a public health issue," fine, as far as it goes, but it is not a public health issue; it is a culture issue, the sickness of American culture more and more evident around us. Look at the gun advocates—pure, unadulterated fascistic thinking. NRA is America's own al Qaeda, doing more harm than terrorists ever could.

## II

After writing, I've just read Mike McIntire's "Selling a New Generation on Guns," in an adjoining column. If one thinks I exaggerate, read that. Positive depravity, a SICK culture, far more pernicious probably than heroin—getting guns into the hands of young children, habituating them to their use—the magazine *Junior Shooter*, "put them under the Christmas Tree." If this isn't fascism-in-the-making, I'd like to know what is. And yet our political leadership stands before NRA with trembling knees, Obama boasting about skeet shooting, Biden, his ownership of shot guns.

I expect nothing less from our Assassination President, whose armed drones are the scandal of the world, and now, with John Brennan as nominee-director of the CIA, and still also Obama's closest adviser, we have torture nicely ensconced in the White House. Perhaps instead of the Stars and Stripes, America should have as its flag a giant BLOOD SPAT, which is what is left when a drone attack does its work.

Happy Hunting, Children!



FEBRUARY 5, 2013

## **Drones, Israel, and the Eclipse of Democracy**

*Murder, she said; No, not the popular song, not Brecht's Arturo Ui (rhymes with phooey), not Chicago's SouthSide gangland variety, but the real stuff of modern times: cold-blooded, methodical, depraved, the peculiar mix of militarism-ideology-practical realism, in a word, the psychopathology of power, whose profile only the modal serial killer would ideally fit—the overkill mentality and practice, to prove one's superiority, muscularity (as opposed to national "softness"), powers of intimidation against the weaker, contempt for humankind, and therefore, deep-down, contempt for human life, including one's own; I mean therefore OFFICIAL violence as practiced by nations, leaving the opposition, as here, either vaporized (US armed drones for political assassination, under Team Obama) or buried deep under rubble (Israeli military attacks in Gaza); a national policy of terror, disproportionate force, women, children, sometimes infants under one-year-old, in the crosshairs, impunity combined with immunity. You get the picture. America and Israel, joined at the hip of international war crimes.*

*All in a week's work, actually less. The New York Times had an article on the new US drone-opening in North Africa and Roger Cohen's column, reflecting on Amos Oz's criticisms of Israel, both of which prompted my brief Comments to the paper, see below, but after thinking about their possible interrelatedness, and then, coupled, with an op-ed piece by George Bisharat, a Hastings Law School professor, on why the Palestinians should find a way to take Israel before the International Criminal Court for possible war-crimes prosecution, I found, in these three items, the basis for working out the interrelations troubling me, the stark phenomenon of war crimes as such. This is the result, a brief look at drone warfare, and principal attention to the Israeli attack on Gaza in early 2009. Eerily, little has changed in the intervening time, the commission of more war crimes by the two—a veritable crime syndicate that Ui, Capone, Lepke, or, in my old home town, Miami Beach, the S. and G., could only envy—except that they didn't have the organized resources of the State behind them, drones, F-16s, batteries of artillery, and the profound indifference to killing in promiscuous fashion. For the crime boys, theirs was a business; our political crime boys, seem made of sterner stuff, the desire to maim and kill, for the glory of—what? I wonder if they themselves know.*

### **1. Counterterrorism as itself terror (deliberate, malicious, cruel)**

On Jan. 29, the New York Times had an article about the US introduction of drones into North Africa. Comments were favorable: zap terrorists; cost/benefit analysis (cheaper than massing ground troops); antiseptic—everything but moral outrage and/or recognition that drone warfare is part of the Obama-Brennan geopolitical strategy of (a) establishing global bases (using drone airstrips to stake out a presence in key areas, otherwise known as "hot spots,"); (b) creating the pretext and incentive justifying the concept and practice of, and commitment to, the condition of permanent war; (c) institutionalizing permanent war as the primordial doctrine binding future administrations, through elaborate rationales, secret legal memos authorizing conduct (including the killing of American citizens), and, as a corollary, keeping the program under the tightest wraps, a disconnection with the American public, who yet fully approve; (d) ensuring the continuance and implementation of drone warfare through continually adding to the names on the "hit lists"—the celebrated Terror Tuesday evenings off the Situation Room, where Obama, Brennan, and representatives from such key players as CIA, Navy Seals, etc., identify targets which "pilots"

8,000 miles away, sitting in air-conditioned splendor, press levers, literally EVAPORATING victims in Pakistan, Somalia, and most probably in other areas, none of which are at war with the US; (e) preventing the dirty, yet accurate, word, “assassination,” like government itself, both falling under the cloak of a morbid hostility toward transparency, from sinking into the public consciousness (I’ve long ago, since Vietnam, given up reaching the public conscience, so weak is it, but even consciousness is largely closed down to what is being done in the name of the American people), no doubt because the perpetrators fear they have something to hide, i.e., self-evident war crimes, which only their high office, America’s global military predominance, and the political-financial intimidation of “friends and allies,” have saved them from being taken before the International Criminal Court (ICC); (f) using drone warfare as a means for keeping alive the societal tensions necessary for a full-scale counterterrorism campaign that has a tendency to spill over into the abrogation of civil liberties at home, the rise of surveillance into a national pastime (hello, incipient McCarthyism), xenophobic responses to immigration (I hesitate to use the word) “reform,” and further pressures to destroy transparency in government and in the military’s own record (we have to rely on the Bureau of Investigative Journalism to inform us of the number of children murdered in drone attacks); (g) integrating the CIA and Joint Special Ops Command (JSOC) in still more secretive activities which have made, under Obama, the reliance on paramilitary forces, along with his signature drones, the one-two punch presumably against adversaries, who have a way of taking on extended definition (“associated forces” is one favorite) possibly in the near-future to include social-revolutionary forces resisting US political-military-commercial-investment penetration; and hence (h) envisioning a global hegemony for the United States, greatly facilitated not only by the ring of military bases (at last count, I believe, exceeding 900) around the world, but also, these drone airstrips, as alluded to in the Times article, complementing, in Africa, the vast installation in Djibouti, with counterterrorism somewhat of a pretext when policymakers have something else in mind, the drone as the new cop on the block for maintaining influence, and a finger locally, in every region, for purposes not even Brennan and Obama have fully worked out.

I could, of course, go through the entire alphabet with these sordid, shameful, vicious, illegal, and profoundly immoral practices—for the record is crystal clear, despite Obama’s passion for obfuscation and his side doors to escape responsibility and accountability. E.g., under the euphemistically sonorous phrase “collateral damage,” civilians of every kind and station in life are murdered in cold blood. I do not exaggerate; press accounts and recent writings, such as CounterPuncher Medea Franklin’s *Drone Warfare*, based on first-person observation and/or testimony, are abundant. And particularly valuable, sufficiently documented to convince the ICC to put them behind bars for life (if ever the opportunity should arise, which most certainly it will not, the US having gone to war over lesser matters than that), is the study conducted by law school faculty, the Stanford-NYU report, “Living Under Drones,” in which the war crimes themselves, as well as the psychological torment exercised on the people through the constant buzzing, then the attack without warning, leaving blood splats where human beings once stood, become really a euphemism for atrocities. That is our Washington, our president, our nation. [See sect. 4, #1, for Comment]

## **2. Israel: Glorification of Force, Denial of Human Rights**

Also on Jan. 29, the Times published Roger Cohen's column on post-election Israel, focusing on the social commentary of Amos Oz, a distinguished writer and self-identified "dove" on Israeli policies toward the Palestinians and critic of domestic politics affecting inequalities of wealth, preferential treatment shown the Orthodox, etc. I respect both men, Cohen for his even-handed treatment of the country, Oz for his general sympathies and ascetic life in the desert. Perhaps it was the drone article that got me going, but after reading Cohen, I began to think about the interrelatedness of the two pieces and the substance behind them. As my Comment to the Times indicates, my admiration for Oz is conditional, for he, in what remains of an Israeli Left, cannot make a break with the record of the society and government. He points out the absolutism of his countrymen, yet drifts into a reverie of relativism which fails to liberate categorically the Palestinians from thralldom to their Israeli jailers. Having written criticisms of Israeli militarism, its policy of assassination, and penchant for supporting dictators, I was prepared to let my Comment stand, and move on. [See sect. 4, #2, for Comment] In today's Times (Jan. 30), however, an op-ed piece appeared, "Why Palestine Should Take Israel to Court in The Hague," written by George Bisharat, on the faculty of the (U. of Calif) Hastings College of Law and a frequent CounterPunch contributor, which forced me awake to the obvious: The interrelatedness between US drones and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, as per the two articles, is the common element of war crimes, war crimes revealing much about the two societies, the jadedness to human aspiration and love of family (as if a Palestinian child or a Pakistani child possesses less moral worth than an American or Israeli child, and similarly, parents who cannot feel the grief at their loss, as opposed to, by definition, the fully human, naturally standing closer to God), an entrenched arrogance, the propensity for overkill, whatever the situation confronted, a preternatural delight in torture (or at least refusal to denounce it), in dealing with putative adversaries (many of whom are ordinary people), and, as before, the list could be continued. Now with Bisharat (and the important links he supplies to the Israeli merciless attack on Gaza), as well as some of my own recently gathered material from the Times and the Washington Post, both of which supporters of Israel will dismiss as biased, as they do the UN, and if coming from a fellow Jew, then necessarily a self-hating Jew. You can't win against totally closed minds.

Bisharat first addresses the transmogrification of international law by Israel's military lawyers. We might call this damage control, were it not more serious. When the Palestinians first sought to join the I.C.C., and then, to receive the UN's conferral of nonmember status on them, Israel raised fierce opposition. Why? He writes: "Israel's frantic opposition to the elevation of Palestine's status at the United Nations was motivated precisely by the fear that it would soon lead to I.C.C. jurisdiction over Palestinian claims of war crimes. Israeli leaders are unnerved for good reason. The I.C.C. could prosecute major international crimes committed on Palestinian soil anytime after the court's founding on July 1, 2002." In response to the threat, we see the deliberate reshaping of the law: Since 2000, "the Israel Defense Forces, guided by its military lawyers, have attempted to remake the laws of war by consciously violating them and then creating new legal concepts to provide juridical cover for their misdeeds." (*Italics, mine*) In other words, habituate the law to the existence of atrocities; in the US's case, targeted assassination, repeated often enough, seems permissible, indeed clever and wise, as pressure is steadily applied to the laws of war. Even then, "collateral damage" is seen as unintentional, regrettable, but hardly prosecutable, and in the current atmosphere of complicity and desensitization, never a war crime. (Obama is hardly a novice at this game of stretching the law to suit the convenience of, shall we say, the national interest? In order to ensure the distortion in counting civilian casualties, which would bring the number down, as

Brennan with a straight face claimed, was “zero,” the Big Lie if ever there was one, placing him in distinguished European company, Obama redefined the meaning of “combatant” status to be any male of military age throughout the area (which we) declared a combat zone, which noticeably led to a higher incidence of sadism, because it allowed for “second strikes” on funerals—the assumption that anyone attending must be a terrorist—and first responders, those who went to the aid of the wounded and dying, themselves also certainly terrorists because of their rescue attempts.) These guys play hardball, perhaps no more than in using—by report—the proverbial baseball cards to designate who would be next on the kill list. But funerals and first responders—verified by accredited witnesses—seems overly much, and not a murmur from an adoring public.

Bisharat provides two specific examples of Israeli war crimes. First, in 2002, “an Israeli F-16 dropped a one-ton bomb on an apartment building in a densely populated Gaza neighborhood, killing a Hamas military leader, Salah Shelhadeh, and 14 others, including his wife and seven children under the age of 15.” And second, in 2009, “Israeli artillery killed more than 20 members of the Samouni family, who had sought shelter in a structure in the Zeitoun district of Gaza City at the bidding of Israeli soldiers.” How does war guilt vanish into the thin air of Israeli legal trumpetry, the corruption of the laws of war? Here is Daniel Reisner, former head of the Israeli military’s international law division, to explain (quoted by Bisharat): “International law progresses through violations. We invented the targeted assassination thesis and we had to push it. At first there were protrusions [i.e., something sticking out, noticeable, causing waves] that made it hard to insert easily into the legal molds. Eight years later it is in the center of the *bounds of legitimacy*.” (Italics, mine) We must remind ourselves, he is talking about assassination, openly boasting therefore about the legitimization of war crimes. The frank admission is commendable, save that it shows utmost contempt for the rule of law, a cynicism, it seems to me, deeply ingrained in the Israeli war machine—as in the way atrocities and cases of mistreatment are routinely dismissed or accorded a pro forma hearing, then dismissed. Reisner and Brennan become interchangeable cogs in that machine. For Obama, who needs Clausewitz, when he has these two?

Let me take leave from Bisharat to examine his examples of Israeli war crimes more closely. On the first, the Times reporter John Kifner, July 24, 2002, describing the “three-mile [funeral] procession today through Gaza City’s bleak streets,” filled in the scene, the F-16, “one-ton laser-guided bomb...densely packed neighborhood...just a few minutes after midnight” and the resulting deaths, “among them nine children.” He adds, “An area about half the size of a city block was leveled, and several buildings were damaged. Shifa Hospital said more than 140 people had been injured, 15 of them seriously.” The procession “drew 100,00 or more marchers,” one detail sharply etched in my mind: “A man held aloft the tiny body of the youngest victim, 2-month-old Dina Mattar, wrapped in a Palestinian flag, her small face visible. She was killed along with her mother and four siblings when upper-story rooms in their building collapsed.” The Israeli response? PM Sharon, “in a formal written statement issued by his office early in the day, described the airstrike as ‘*one of our major successes*.’” (Italics, mine)

Not good enough; callousness to human suffering, categorical pushing back, this time didn’t work, as “worldwide condemnation began pouring in,” from the European Union, and even George Bush, so “Israeli officials scrambled to put the best face on their actions.” The responses are instructive. (Please remember, this is John Kifner reporting, not Joseph Stalin or Chairman Mao, so the account is not readily dismissed.) General Harel, the army’s chief of operations: “We launched a

precision attack....Only this house was hit, the house collapsed and this mastermind terrorist died. Unfortunately, along with him died several civilians, apparently innocent, and we are very sorry for it.” The building’s fault, not the laser-guided bomb—and were the others really innocent? Israelis never apologize—without conditions or sarcasm. At the same briefing, a “senior military official” (his and others’ remarks were not to be for attribution) states, “This was the only house that collapsed. It’s not clear to us right now where the other casualties were. There was no intention of killing people in the area. We did not estimate that houses in the area would be seriously damaged or collapse. Our assessment was that the damage to them would be minor.” The statement was similarly exonerative to that offered by US officials, in the drone killing of al-Awlaki’s son, Abdulrahman (like his father an American citizen), set down in the report as an unfortunate “bystander”—16-years-old, although the government tried to make him over 21, to satisfy Obama’s combatant-definition, until his family produced a copy of his birth certificate showing his age and that he was born in Denver. As for General Harel and the unnamed “senior military official,” Kifner’s reporting demonstrates their straight-out lying about the extent of damage: “But in Gaza City there was a large flat area in the middle of a street of densely packed apartment houses. Neighbors said there had been three buildings on the spot, one of three stories, and two of two stories.” He continues: “All that remained were chunks of cinder block, several stumps of what had been pillars, pulverized lumps of concrete with twisted snarls of what had been iron reinforcement bars poking out of them, remnants of plumbing pipes and scraps of clothing.” Kifner ends this heartbreaking account, “A half-dozen buildings in an arc around the hole were badly damaged, chunks of their sides ripped off and floors partly destroyed.” Scraps of clothing, chunks of cinder block—Israelis have brought Gethsemane to Gaza City, not the agony of Jesus but the death of a whole people entitled, like all people, to live in freedom and without fear, and without laser-guided bombs suddenly reining down on them—while the whole world sits on its hands.

The second example of Israeli war crimes to which Bisharat referred, in which 20 members of one family were killed in an artillery attack, was reported by Sabrina Tavernise and Taghreed El-Khodary, again in the Times (Jan. 18, 2009). The article’s title says it all, “Shocked and Grieving Gazans Find Bodies Under the Rubble of Homes.” Israelis had not learned anything from the previous attack, if anything becoming still more ferocious—the article making clear, a degree of inhumanity rare even by their own standards. Above the article, there is a photograph of a grave site, people solemnly gathered around, with the following legend underneath: “In Gaza City on Sunday, relatives buried the bodies of members of the Samouni family who were killed in attacks by Israel. More than 20 bodies of family members were recovered Sunday.” The writers grimly begin: “It was a day of digging and bitter discovery. Houses had lost walls, and the dead, after three weeks of war, had lost their faces. Families identified them by their clothes.” (*Italics, mine*) This reminds one of saturation-bombing or carpet-bombing, the insidious itch to destroy, and more, to terrorize civilian populations. They write: “As the people of Gaza emerged from hiding [similar to the drone attacks in Pakistan, as described in the Stanford-NYU report] on Sunday, they confronted, for the first time, the full, sometimes breathtaking extent of the destruction around them wrought by the Israeli military. [Once more, not Stalin-Mao, or worse to the Israelis, some UN observer, but Times reporters] Bombs had pulverized the Parliament and cabinet buildings, the Ministry of Justice, the main university and the police station, paralyzing Gaza’s central nervous system and leaving residents in a state of shock.” (*Italics, mine*) One way to obviate the need for a two-state solution is to destroy the government buildings—more to the point, humiliate the people, destroy their confidence in themselves, in the form of a scorched-earth policy of the mind. Yet the people

were not, at least for some, humbled into submission. “Some places in Gaza City,” the reporters note, “were bustling and matter-of-fact. Work crews in bright orange vests repaired water and power lines. Shops reopened. People lined up at bank machines.”

But that proved the exception. What follows is difficult to read (much less, from which to quote), for the ancestors of the Holocaust have created a micro-holocaust of their own, against, like their forebears, a defenseless people. The reporters continue: “But other areas ached with loss. In Twam to the north, thousands dragged belongings away from ruined houses; they were dazed refugees in their own city. In Zeitoun, families clawed at rubble and concrete, trying to dislodge the bodies of relatives who had died weeks before. The death toll kept climbing: 95 bodies were taken from the rubble.” Zeitoun had been home to the massacred family: “More than 20 of them were from the Samouni family, whose younger members were digging with shovels and hands for relatives stuck in rooms inside. Faris Samouni, 59, sat alone, watching them. He had lost his wife, daughter-in-law, grandson and nephew, and he was heartbroken.” I deliberately do not italicize; the words themselves shout out to us—and this from the staid Times—of murder, treachery, refugees, rubble, digging with hands and shovels, the dead trapped inside the ruins. And Mr. Samouni: “‘Twenty-one are down there,’ he said, starting to cry. ‘One is my wife. Her name is Rizka.’” I wish I could throw this in the face of every Israeli. As a Jew I can think of Rizka as my mother, and the mother of all children everywhere at every time. But for Israelis, ho-hum, the emotional outburst of another self-hating Jew. What do you expect, they would and DO say, the world is against us, even disloyal Jews are turning away. Why doesn’t AIPAC smear them into pride and compliance with Jewish solidarity? And the recitation of evil goes on, so reminiscent of William L. Shirer’s book on the Third Reich—the attempt to identify corpses, trinkets, the stench—except now the situation has been reversed, the perpetrators being Jews, with a fighter jet flying over to remind the people of Israeli power, intimidate them, overawe them, all at the time of their profoundest misery.

To the point, the writers state: “The dead were badly decomposed, and families searched for familiar personal details that would identify them. One woman’s corpse was identified by her gold bracelets. Another by her earrings. And a third by the nightgown she wore. The smell of rotting flesh was suffocating, and as they got closer, the diggers donned masks.” Rizka and the fighter jet, simultaneous, as though recapitulating in an instant of time, the history of oppression, the strong over the weak: “At 10:55 a.m., the body of Rizka Samouni emerged as an Israeli fighter jet roared in the sky. Other corpses followed. Houda, 18. Faris, 14. Hamdi, 21. The smallest corpse that emerged, from a different family, was that of a 4-year-old.” Rizka’s brother, Subhi, 55, said, “‘They killed the elders, the children, the women, the animals, the chickens....It’s a nightmare. I never thought I would lose all of them.’” The chickens, too; calling up images of a Czarist pogrom in my mother’s village as a child, 20 kilometers west of Minsk. (Israelis to this day have not learned that human misery knows no separate identities, but is universal in its pain, and those who inflict the pain, under whatever flag, or whatever color uniform and insignia, are pariahs in the sight of whomever or whatever source one wishes to invoke.)

There was a brief flurry, bureaucracy in the war machine (twisting the knife into the now-refugees): “Around noon, a worker from the Red Crescent ran up to the diggers. The Israelis had called, telling the people to leave, he said. The families began to run, again. ‘We have to go!’ a woman shouted. ‘But where can we go? Where do we go?’ An Israeli military spokesman said the order had been issued because the Red Crescent had not coordinated its movement in advance.”

Eichmann would have understood. The lesson driven home, of gaining prior approval, the order was lifted, “permission was granted and the diggers returned to exhume the remaining bodies.” Jet fighters, donkey carts—correcting for time, place, and technology, Twam might have been Rotterdam or some other city bombed-out in the Second World War, as their account suggests to me: “One of the areas worst hit was Twam, a neighborhood north of Gaza City, which by Friday afternoon had turned into a disorganized mass move. Donkey carts lurched over torn-up roads, spilling pillows and bedding into the dirt. People dragged bed frames and mattresses out of bombed-out houses. Small boys carried bookshelves. Curtains tied in giant sacks held clothes. Decorative cloth flowers fluttered from a half-closed trunk.” In the words of one newly-created refugee, Riad Abbas Khalawa: “‘It’s madness....Now our home is gone. There’s no place for us to sit together as a family.’”

Stunned, in search of an explanation for Israeli actions, there was a recognition that Hamas, the presumed object of the operation, was unscathed, that many themselves were not even supporters, and rather, that this was an attack on the people, to get them to leave Gaza. As one, gathered in the crowd around Khalawa, shouted: “‘It’s a war against us as people....What happened to Hamas? Nothing!’” A crime against a people—genocide—seems to me accurate, with Hamas a convenient target or pretext for ridding the territory of Palestinians. The aftermath was one of somber reflection, the weight hanging heavily on peoples’ shoulders. One example: “Beker Rahim, a 26-year-old who works for a water distributor, was walking with a cradle on his head, and a blue plastic jug of homegrown olives in his right hand. He had to move a corpse on Sunday morning from near his house, placing it respectfully at the gates of the mosque. As he walked to his house, he saw it had been mostly destroyed and was unlivable.” Another: “‘It was my dream and now it was erased,’ said Hadija Saker, 55, who ticked off the evidence, as she saw it, of Israel’s unjust actions. She said Hamas lacked influence in the area. A teacher at a United Nations school lived on one side. A journalist on the other. Most painful, she said, were her lemon trees, which she had nurtured for years and now lay crushed under the sandy soil crisscrossed with the marks of tank tracks.” To those who drive tanks, it is perhaps inconceivable that Palestinians dream, and care about, their lemon trees.

Callousness of the conquering heroes: “Anger was compounded when people concluded that Israeli soldiers appeared to have been using their houses. The Sakers found wrappers for chocolate cranberry power bars and corn puffs with Hebrew writing. In another, a child found a tiny Torah.” (I won’t even bother to comment on the implied desecration involved here.) Others pointed out they were Fatah supporters, but that Hamas’s rocket fire did not justify Israel’s disproportionate, i.e., overkill, response. Ziad Dardasawi, 40, a wood importer, and Fatah supporter, said of that response: “‘Let’s say someone from Hamas fired a rocket—is it necessary to punish the whole neighborhood for that?’ he said, standing in a stairway of his uncle’s house, where furniture had been smashed, and all the windows broken. He drew on an analogy he thought would strike a chord: ‘In the U.S., when someone shoots someone, is his entire family punished?’” He might as easily have mentioned, in light of the practice of collective punishment, a reference closer to the Jewish experience in Nazi-dominated Europe. Also, Dardasawi does put his finger on the phenomenon of blowback, the resistance to—indeed, not to mince words, retaliation for—the carnage wrought (similar to what is happening in response to Obama’s drone campaign of targeted assassination, in which, for each individual killed, especially through “collateral damage,” as is very much the case in Gaza as well, there are multiple others to take his place: “The Israeli actions made the situation more intractable,

he said. ‘How can I convince my neighbors now for the option of peace? I can’t.’ He added: ‘Israel is breeding extremists. The feeling you get is that they just want you to leave Gaza.’”

Finally nightfall, the enormity of the personal tragedy further sinking in: “It was almost dark and the Samounis were finally burying their dead. It took time to find a car big enough to carry them all. A man had to stand in the back to keep them from falling out. At the cemetery, a battery-powered neon light cast an eerie glow over men digging the graves. There was a moment of panic when Hamas militants launched a rocket not far away, but then nothing happened.” When one sees vividly the logistics of death, preventing bodies from falling out of an overloaded car of the dead, the battery-powered neon light, and now, the grave site itself overloaded, what, really, is there left to be said? The reporters, once more: “A final obstacle: There was not enough room to bury all the bodies. The family opened up an old grave to accommodate them. A cousin, Khamis el-Sayess, observed bitterly, ‘Even our dead have no land.’” The meaning of the Occupation: “Even our dead have no land.” The last word must go to youth, and to hope. “But for Yasser Smama,” they conclude, “a teenager who was also part of the crowd, there was almost a resigned hope. ‘Today is not the end,’ he said. ‘Today we bury our dead, and we pick ourselves up.’ Then he pointed to the sky [just as perhaps in Shirer’s account of an execution at a mass grave dug by the concentration camp inmates, the grandfather cradling the child and pointing upward to the sky, as the Nazi machine gunner, a cigarette dangling from his lips, was about to fire], and said, ‘We have to be strong because they might hit us again tomorrow.’”

### **3. In Memoriam: Dina Mattar, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, Rizka Samouni**

For additional insight into the Israeli attack, I turn first to Times correspondent Ethan Bronner, whose provocatively (and correctly) titled article, “Israel Reminds Foes That It Has Teeth,” (Dec. 29, 2008), was published three weeks before, after the second day of the onslaught. Bronner, well-connected with the military, superbly reveals the operant mind-set: Strike hard, act with disproportionate force, intimidate, as if—reading between the lines—one sees, on the part of the Israeli military, pride in the exercise of violence (hardly Bronner’s intent to bring out), perhaps with the further twist that spilling blood becomes the elixir of life, renewed youth, muscularity, manhood. The springboard for Gaza, after the first invasion of 2002, was the Lebanon War of 2006, which the Israeli military saw as an inconclusive victory because insufficient force was applied—a “Never Again” moment when, from here on out, we vow that we will not make the same mistake of going easy on our enemies. There actually was, I recall, the extremely heavy use of force, and then, the seeding of the frontier with a massive dose of cluster bombs. That apparently was not enough. Hezbollah’s will was not crushed. Other nations will think we’re getting (or going) soft. We’ll show the world through attacking Gaza with the force all will come to respect—hence the title for Bronner’s piece. All of that destruction, death, human suffering, for what? To underwrite an ego-trip, give Israelis a shot in the arm of confidence, confirm them in their belief as being *uebermensch*, over Dina’s dead body, just as, for Americans, over Abdulrahman’s dead body, one two-months old, the other, sixteen years.

Bronner begins (again, recall, this precedes the foregoing account by three weeks, plenty of time to withdraw, close the spigot of violence, look in the mirror and question one’s motives—but no, the damage only got worse): “Israel’s military operation in Gaza is aimed primarily at forcing Hamas to end its rocket barrages and military buildup. But it has another goal as well: to expunge the ghost of its flawed 2006 war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and *re-establish* Israeli deterrence.”



(Italics, mine) Things had just begun, but already the overpowering use of force: “On the second day of the offensive, which has already killed hundreds and is devastating Hamas’s resources, Israeli commanders on Sunday were lining up tanks and troops at the border.” But this was all right, since renewed occupation was not part of the plan: “But they were also insisting that they did not intend to reoccupy the coastal strip of 1.5 million Palestinians or to overthrow the Hamas government there.” One would have hoped that such military force directed against such a densely populated center would have pulled them back upright. Bronner is so valuable here, both for internalizing with little question the Israeli military thought processes and values, and, good reporter that he is, faithfully recording them for us, especially for this particular flash point of conflict. The reason overthrowing Hamas isn’t worth the candle is because something worse might replace it; instead, a more hardnosed peace treaty with Hamas is needed. Still teasing out the basic motivation for the attack, he continues: “Such a concrete goal, however, should not obscure the fact that Israel has a larger concern—it worries that its enemies are less afraid of it than they once were, or should be. Israeli leaders are calculating that *a display of power* in Gaza could fix that.” (Italics, mine) Killing these people isn’t enough, one also shows disrespect by not even caring who they are, simply a prop for conducting foreign policy (if that is what it is) via the sheer use of force.

The magic elixir of force—the reporter’s emphasis on energy to counter doubt: ”’In the cabinet room today there was an energy, a feeling that after so long of showing restraint we had finally acted,’ said Mark Regev, spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, speaking of the weekly government meeting that he attended.” (Not unlike Obama’s Terror Tuesday weekly meeting with Brennan and the boys, tossing off restraint, finally acting, with hit lists for designated murder.) Regev’s assessment (boast?) was seconded by “a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University,” Mark Heller, who said that “that energy reflected the deep feeling among average Israelis that the country had to regain its deterrent capacity.” From the military and government, to the think tanks, to the man in the street, one finds a wonderful concurrence on the virtues of power, strength, force. Rizka Samouni doesn’t stand a chance. Heller is a superlative guide into the Israeli mind—my congratulations (and to Bronner for quoting him): “‘There has been a nagging sense of uncertainty in the last couple of years of whether anyone is really afraid of Israel anymore,’ he said. ‘The concern is that in the past—perhaps a mythical past—people didn’t mess with Israel because they were afraid of the consequences. Now the region is filled with provocative rhetoric about Israel the paper tiger. This operation is an attempt to re-establish the perception that if you provoke or attack you are going to pay a *disproportionate* price.’” (Italics, mine)

Heller’s statement, which it appears is fairly typical of what one hears among defense intellectuals, in the US and Israel (themselves, together, a tightly-wound group), invites a judgment of psychopathology, as in his remark about “a mythical past,” which comes down to a golden age of stirring fear in the hearts of others, to which its opposite is mated, the obsession with weakness, as in the remark about being considered a “paper tiger,” a thought too horrible or unsettling to contemplate, which in turn calls for the resolution, a supreme manifestation of bullying to allay all fears and resolve all doubts—the “disproportionate price” to be exacted or inflicted on all comers who threaten this fragile self-image of doubt, aggression, ego-loss, our collective ubermensch in search of conquest of those still weaker. The banner has “overkill” inscribed on it, lest the victim fight back, resist, or even penetrate the façade of emptiness, in full heroic dress. There is something

pathetic about the doctrine and practice of exacting a “disproportionate price” at every occasion, as though doubting one’s own internal strength and moral core, in this case perfectly understandable.

Bronner, recalling Lebanon, discusses how Israelis learned the lesson there about finishing the job: “Israel began that war vowing to decimate Hezbollah without fully realizing the extent of its military infrastructure, underground bunkers and rocket arsenals. And while many in Lebanon and overseas considered Israel’s military activities to be excessive, in Israel the opposite conclusion was reached—that it had been too restrained, too careful about distinguishing between Hezbollah and the state of Lebanon.” The statement, probably accurate in reflecting the prevalent mood, could be seen as calling for an open season on the civilian population, for “distinguishing between Hezbollah and the state of Lebanon” had interfered with the wholesale destruction—the unforgivable reticence which thwarted its actions, as in “decimate”—of both, the latter included because it allowed Hezbollah to exist in its midst. Like Obama’s second-strike credo, 100% allegiance has to be assured. Those attending the funerals of victims are probably terrorists themselves or fellow travelers. The same for first responders. If, as also happened, if five men are involved in changing a tire, one of whom is a suspect, all five are dispatched or their ranks decimated. Bronner might have quit while he seemed ahead, but, good reporter that he is, there is more. Our favorite, “a senior military officer” (hence not for attribution), said of Lebanon, “We were not decisive enough, and that will not happen again.” And on the war of the moment: “I have flown over Gaza thousands of times and we know how to hit something within two meters.” This is not only false, as witness the breadth and depth of destruction, unless of course our “senior military officer” intended the widespread destruction, but is exactly what US officials, starting from Obama and Brennan, have been saying about drone strikes, its surgical precision. Because of these thousands of flights, one would have expected more careful target selection (especially given the putative accuracy), instead of the indiscriminate slaughter which took place—unless that was the purpose, the accuracy being put to good use, in the first place.

There is a certain barbaric pride in the reconnaissance operation, for what it led to (still, of course, discounting or denying outright civilian casualties): “The current operation started only after preparation and intelligence work, military commanders said, leading to a true surprise attack on Saturday and the instant deaths of scores of Hamas men. The Israeli military had mapped out Hamas bases, training camps and missile storehouses and systematically hit them simultaneously in an Israeli version of ‘shock and awe,’ the sudden delivery of overwhelming force.” This is becoming too much: boasting about “a true surprise attack” (Rizka Samouni, along with many others, was struck without warning shortly after midnight); boasting further about “shock and awe”; boasting about “the sudden delivery of overwhelming force” (both elements of the attack are important), along with one’s query about whether Rizka Samouni was killed in this or that training camp or missile storehouse, or rather, in her bed, in an apartment house in a densely packed quarter, all together speak to the psychopathology of willed destruction unworthy of any claim to representing a democratic government or ethos. Here, Ehud Barak, whom we associate with Camp David and peace (Ha!), now in charge of the Gaza campaign, followed the advice of Ron Ben-Yishai, “a veteran military correspondent,” on the lessons of Lebanon: Don’t rush in, instead, choose carefully the “moment and circumstances,” which, to Ben-Yashai’s satisfaction, Barack did (the aforementioned surprise attack). As Bronner explains, Barack acted, “not only behind the scenes but through a subtle public disinformation campaign. On Friday night, after having decided to launch the operation, he appeared on a satirical television program. An attack seemed at least

several days away and Hamas, which had been holding its breath, relaxed. The next day, the Jewish Sabbath, and the first day of the Arab workweek, Israel struck.” The Sabbath? Not its desecration? And if not, why not? Israelis love their games, stealth attacks employing overwhelming force being one of them.

Still 9 days before the Tavernise-El Khodary article, Craig Whitlock (one of my favorite national-security reporters) and Reyham Abdel Kareem, writing in the Washington Post (Jan. 9, 2009), present a damning indictment of Israeli conduct in the war against Gaza, a brutality difficult to fathom, as indicated by the article’s title, “100 Survivors Rescued in Gaza From Ruins Blocked by Israelis,” and the subtitle (all of which is confirmed), “Relief Agencies Fear More Are Trapped, Days After Neighborhood Was Shelled.” Deny it if one can, but Israelis hold the lives of Palestinians cheap—that, of course, is what the doctrine and application of disproportionate force is all about, not simply killing the same individual several times over, but killing more individuals, whether to prove a point, teach an object lesson, or drive home the idea that one Israeli is worth tens, hundreds, thousands, of the Other. Otherwise, how confirm one’s own superior status, legitimate the means for keeping it from being challenged, and silencing any moral inhibitions about one’s conduct that may have somehow crept in (perhaps from the Torah itself)? In the present case, Israeli soldiers prevented rescuers from saving victims buried in the rubble, a standoff that meant certain, agonizing death for those, still calling for help from beneath tons of concrete, who might have survived. Whether doing what Israel did here—not the act of individuals, but official military policy—is more or less morally reprehensible than Obama and Brennan’s targeting of funerals and first responders—also official policy of the United States, I leave for theologians (if they can stomach it) to debate.

The article begins: “Emergency workers said they rescued 100 more trapped survivors Thursday and found between 40 and 50 corpses in a devastated residential block south of Gaza City that the Israeli military had kept off-limits to the International Committee of the Red Cross for four days. Relief agencies said they feared more people remained in the rubble of several shattered houses in the Zaytoun neighborhood [where the Samouni family resided, as we saw, losing 20 members]. Red Cross officials said they began receiving distress calls from people in the houses late Saturday but that they were blocked by the Israeli military from reaching the area until Wednesday. ‘There are still people under demolished houses—we are sure of it,’ said Khaled Abuzaid, an ambulance driver for the Red Cross who treated survivors at the site Wednesday and Thursday. ‘But without water or electricity, we are sure they will die.’” (Italics, mine) One perhaps cannot expect Israeli soldiers to throw in and help, even with bare hands, with the rescue, still less, lay down their weapons and resign in disgust; but obstructing the rescue of dying human beings, or being so cold to the dead beneath their boots (which sitting shiva in the case of their own family deaths might have somehow reached through protective-defensive layers to soften them to appreciation of the grief of others, or even plain respect for the dead as such), is beyond reach. As in the one time I attended a Jewish Studies meeting in my university, and raised, from having read Benny Morris, the Israeli historian, examples of Israeli soldiers’ raping and looting, the faculty panelist simply said, to end all discussion, “Well, soldiers will be soldiers.” I have not returned since.

Thanks to Whitlock and Kareem, we have more from Abuzaid (slightly different spellings from the above account, e.g., now the al-Samuni family, or Zaytoun, should not confuse the reader), who provides added material on the events: “In an interview at al-Quds Hospital, a Red Cross medical

center in Gaza, Abuzaid said rescue workers found 16 bodies Wednesday in a large room of a house in Zaytoun: seven women, six children and three men, all members of the al-Samuni family. Most had sustained trauma injuries from shelling, but many had gunshot wounds as well, he said. Four children, weak but alive, were found lying under blankets, *nestled next to their dead mothers.*” (Italics, mine) There was, finally, a small window opened for rescue operations—with strings attached: “Abuzaid said he was part of a crew of 10 paramedics and other rescue workers who reached Zaytoun on Wednesday afternoon, during a three-hour break in combat operations in Gaza during which relief agencies were allowed to deliver supplies and medical care to stricken Gazans. He said Israeli soldiers told the crew of Red Cross and Palestinian Red Crescent workers in advance that they were *forbidden* to take cameras, radios or cellphones to the site. It is standard practice for crews to carry such equipment on rescue missions.” (Italics, mine)

What follows suggests why Israel has such contempt for the UN, which probably extends to the Red Cross as well; they’re both onto its act, the war crimes committed with impunity—the resistance to Palestinian membership, as George Bisharat made clear, done for that very reason, fear of exposure before the International Criminal Court. Thus, the reporters’ enumeration continues: “The Red Cross has accused the Israeli military of repeatedly refusing to grant permission for ambulances to go to Zaytoun, even though soldiers were stationed outside the damaged houses and were aware people were wounded inside. In a statement issued early Thursday, the agency called the episode ‘unacceptable’ and said the Israeli military had ‘failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded.’ The Israeli military said it was investigating but declined to respond to specific allegations by the Red Cross....The United Nations also pressed Israel to investigate the Red Cross allegations. John Holmes, chief of U.N. humanitarian aid programs, called the Zaytoun deaths ‘a particularly outrageous incident.’ ‘What they found was absolutely horrifying,’ he said at a news conference in New York. B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights group [thank goodness they spoke out in the otherwise deafening silence], said residents of Zaytoun who had been trapped in other houses have given similar accounts of how Israeli soldiers were aware of their plight but refused to allow rescue workers into the neighborhood. ‘What these family members say consistently is that the IDF was close by,’ said Sarit Michaeli, a spokeswoman for the group....’This wasn’t some remote area. The soldiers certainly were about and were aware of their position.”

The situation even gets worse, including a My Lai magnitude and kind of atrocity which Bisharat had referred to (he wrote, “Israeli artillery killed more than 20 members of the Samouni family, who had sought shelter in a structure...at the bidding of Israeli soldiers,”), except that it is not clear whether the structure was their own home or another, and also “at the bidding” is too polite; many more had died, and had been knowingly forced into the house for that purpose. First, the account of preliminaries—round-ups, deprivations: “Access to Zaytoun...remained highly restricted Thursday. Red Cross and Red Crescent crews were allowed back to the site during another three-hour break in the fighting, evacuating 103 people who had been trapped for days without food and water....Other relief officials said the people rescued Thursday were crammed inside a handful of houses on the same block as the Samunis’ house. Two surviving members of the Samuni family said dozens of their relatives in the area had been rounded up by the Israeli military early Sunday and ordered to stay inside a handful of houses while soldiers conducted operations door-to-door. They said some people died in the shelling, which left a gaping hole in the roof of the Samuni home.” Are Israelis listening? Thus, “On Friday, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said it

had confirmed the account of what happened to the Samuni family. Calling it ‘one of the gravest incidents’ in Gaza since the start of fighting, the U.N. said Israeli soldiers had *packed about 110 Palestinians into the house Sunday, then ‘shelled the home repeatedly’ 24 hours later.*” (Italics, mine)

Round-up = premeditated killing, all taking place outside the world’s scrutiny (or perhaps caring), people in shock, disbelieving, hounded and herded in scenes that would have been familiar to the victims of World War II. The reporters continue: “The U.N. said about 30 people were killed inside. It said three children, the youngest five months old, died after reaching a hospital. Survivors of the fighting in Zaytoun remained scattered at hospitals across Gaza on Friday....The Israeli military had barred foreign journalists from entering Gaza. ‘It was horrible,’ said Shifaa Samuni, 70, who was detained in the family’s house but fled with her grandson Monday afternoon after the killings. She said two of her sons and three daughters-in-law were among the dead. ‘Look how much I lost,’ she said at al-Quds Hospital, where she was receiving treatment for minor injuries, including wounds to her hands. ‘Why? We did nothing. We are a peaceful family.’” Another witness, Ahmad Talal Samuni, 23, described the neighborhood as coming “under heavy shelling and helicopter gunfire Saturday night,” and related how the soldiers “told us not to leave—not by using loudspeakers, but by shooting....The soldiers were shooting in the air and they told us to go east, in the direction of Salah Din Street.” This may have been the same massacre, seen from another angle; the circumstances were similar, but the number of casualties, number herded into the house, and the time of attack appear to differ from the other account—in any case, this was horrible enough, whether the scene of a second massacre or the original one.

The reporters, still drawing on Ahmad Samuni’s testimony, write: “The soldiers ordered the family into a large concrete house owned by another relative....By then, about 70 people were gathered inside, he recalled. ‘The soldiers told us not to leave....We were hungry. There was no milk for the babies, no medicine for the ill children.’” The narrative is resumed by Meysa Fawzi Samuni, 19, in an interview with *B’Tselem* (the reporters’ summary): “Shortly before dawn Monday, three Samuni men decided to leave the house so they could gather other relatives and bring them back....[Then] an explosion struck the doorway of the house as the three men prepared to leave, killing one of them. Moments later, a larger explosion on the roof rocked the house. She said she fell to the floor, covering her infant daughter with her body. [Now her own words] ‘Everything filled up with smoke and dust, and I heard screams and crying. After the smoke and dust cleared a bit, I looked around and saw 20-30 people who were dead, and about 20 who were wounded’....She said she was only slightly injured; her baby also survived but lost three fingers in the explosion.” Shortly after, she, her brother-in-law, and her two younger sisters “fled and knocked on the door of another relative’s home nearby,” which “Israeli soldiers had already occupied... and were guarding about 30 Palestinians inside, some of whom had been blindfolded.” She and her daughter were released, the brother-in-law, hands tied, blindfolded—and she wandered until she found an ambulance, “which took them to Shifa Hospital, where she later met a few relatives who had escaped the shelling on the house....” Meysa Samuni’s words, I should like to see inscribed on the entrance to the Knesset: “As far as I know, the dead and the wounded who were under the ruins are still there.”

Given this context, in which the State of Israel has inflicted armed violence, forced submission, and human suffering on the Palestinian people, it is no wonder that Bisharat wants Palestinians to

press their case before the International Criminal Court for the prosecution of possible Israeli war crimes—the clear reason for Israel’s resistance to according them legitimate standing at the Court and membership in the UN. As a lawyer, he rejects what we saw above, Daniel Reisner’s pronouncement, “International law progresses through violations,” so obviously cynical as to jeopardize the existence of the rule of law, a lesson Americans refuse to take to heart when Obama has done, and continues to do, precisely the same thing. Drone warfare is an abomination; its purpose, assassination, requires condemnation even stronger. Failure to divulge the legal memoranda providing justification for this vile practice itself speaks to exactly the same fear motivating Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the need to fend off accusations of war crimes, or even the initiation of investigations to that end. I referred earlier to the interrelatedness of seemingly different policies; yet, assuming armed drones for targeted assassination and the sustained destruction of a people, its land, its right of self-determination, its spirit, constitute a disparate mix (which I would deny), there is still the underlying, more fundamental, abridgement of human aspirations forcibly suffocated and destroyed through the use of superior power. Evil comes in various guises, not unusually parading under the name of democracy, but to the overawed, the nonmurderous, those who ask only for peace, a little breathing space, an acknowledgment of personal dignity and moral worth, to them, all the phony labels in the world cannot remove the stench of fascism. Will America seek the fresh air of social love, mutual respect, equity permeating the law and governing the content and character of political and economic institutions, this as the starting place for the peace and justice which has alluded the nation from its founding? Will Israel do the same?

When I refer to the eclipse of democracy, this can be seen in and between the lines of each account, the distortions of law, the interrelatedness of illegal murder, the depravity when it comes to violating human sacredness. Eclipse signifies a falling into obscurity or decline—yes, quite so; it also signifies the passing into the shadow of a celestial body—even more accurate, except that now the shadow gives promise of consuming the celestial body, or more likely, the celestial body itself devolving into shadow, democracy without substance, democracy without rights, democracy the core of which is a moral void, not unlike that of its present leader in the White House.

#### **4. Comments to the New York Times**

My Comments to the Times over several years have been intended to stake out advanced ground so that I might make a slight dent in the frozen political-ideological spectrum, chiefly, since Obama took office, to mount criticisms of his record from the Left, which, in every area of public policy, seems deficient and accommodative to a fault. The first two relate to the discussion, respectively, of the drone and Israel, the remainder to the Israeli assault on Gaza in late 2008-early 2009, written at the time of the events.

*[1. NYT, 1/28/13, a brief statement of creeping intervention; addendum, 1/29/13, geopolitical strategy. Claims of drones for purposes of surveillance only, now North Africa, fail the test of honesty everywhere the argument was used, because of subsequent arming.]*

When do ISR operations turn into armed drones for targeted assassination? Who’s kidding whom? We know from an earlier Times article about the extent of the Djibouti airstrip and the implication that the drone—as now appears true—is the entering wedge for more extensive regional operations. The Us is planting drone bases at all the “hot spots,” a form of creeping intervention

and/or imperialism which, if everything goes as can be predicted from the results in Pakistan, we shall see BLOWBACK, the recruitment of more men to al Qaeda because of our actions. [Addendum]

My previous Comment yesterday sought to place drone warfare into context, this airstrip in N. Africa, complementing the base in Djibouti, signifying the drone as in the vanguard of US geopolitical strategy for creating a global military presence. That much should be obvious, with claims of surveillance a fig leaf to make the operation palatable to the public. Fine. What must be said is that the Obama-Brennan team is jumping head-first into war-criminal territory. This is moral depravity, compounded and abetted by an American public too selfish, fearful, deliberately mind-blank, indifferent to care. Innocent civilians are being murdered—nay, VAPORIZED—in our name. Obama can sleep well at night, the blood washed off his hands, because at his core is a moral void, overlaid with a cynicism knowing that he can act because the American people are similarly indifferent to gross moral violations of law and human decency.

*[2. NYT, 1/28/13. Roger Cohen, in an op-ed piece, criticizes Israel's postelection future, using novelist Amos Oz as a breath of sanity—correct, except Oz cannot make a clean break with government policy.]*

Poor Oz. He questions absolutism, yet his is an absolutism of relativism, hiding behind a Chekhovian facade. The mumbo-jumbo, the literary view of conflict, is flat-out escapist: The Israeli public, as per Cohen's description, reveals the satiety of those who for too long coddled themselves while maltreating the inevitable Other. Whatever idealism early Zionism may or may not have expressed (and there is doubt on that score), its militarism, callousness, indifference to human life and human dignity makes Israel justifiably viewed as EVIL in the eyes of most of the world.

As a believing, observant Jew, I do not want Israel around my neck. Judaism is too important to mankind's moral history, to have a blood-soaked Israel disgracing it and pulling it down. The recent election merely confirms the utter selfishness, self-indulgence, moral emptiness of the people. Perhaps with all the big talk, Israel should put back on the agenda the bombing of Iran, so that the world in response could rein-in its baseness, its glorification of force, its nuclear cloud hanging over the region.

*[3. NYT, 12/31/2008. A response to the Gazan invasion: the normality of genocide]*

The Israeli attack on Gaza is wholly disproportionate to the provocation of rockets, and therefore raises the antecedent question: what impels a nation to display, and exercise, overwhelming force against a weaker party? I suspect that the original Zionist vision, fueled by socialist idealism, is dead, and perhaps had already been extinguished by the mid-1950s, to be replaced by its own peculiar brand of xenophobia that showed contempt for international law and organization, and a willingness to support retrograde governments which held down their own peoples.

It would be a cheap psychological shot to say that the oppressed internalize the values and mental habits of their oppressors, but Jews—the most persecuted group in the twentieth century—have, as a result, historically shifted from Left to Right and twisted out of all reason or context the meaning of “Never again,” to become, instead, in Israel's case, the warrior-state par excellence. As a conservative Jew, I feel, particularly now, that I, and hopefully countless others, am fighting for

the soul of world Jewry, who are standing up and saying “Enough” to Israel’s rigid, antidemocratic mindset.

*[4. NYT, 1/6/2009. One week later, amid vast Israeli-caused destruction; early exposure of Obama]*

The Times persists in its apologia for Israel. Even today’s article, “Mounting Death Toll,” devotes only three short paragraphs at the end to the “severe humanitarian crisis.” Apparently, the rational, sensible, impartial, centrist solution is the call for a cease fire, after the carnage, annihilation, and indiscriminate firing—artillery, tanks, helicopters, all following upon a withering bombing attack which hit more than a thousand targets.

And the world sits by, averting its eyes. One does not have to defend Hamas (which may or may not be a “proxy” for Iran) to suggest a moral catastrophe in the making: not only Israel’s sadistic display of power, but also the UN’s own cowardice in failing to intervene to stop the destruction (notwithstanding the U.S.’s veto power) or rally world opinion (it cannot even protect its own Gazan installations from Israeli shelling), and finally, the absolute callousness to human suffering of the President-elect, who lamely claims that we have one president at a time. Barack Obama, by his SILENCE, forfeits all rights to occupying the moral high ground on whatever issues before this country in the coming years. What an auspicious start to his presidency!

*[5. NYT, same date—still early in the assault. Evidence of brutality; Israel hides behind, and violates the teachings of, Judaism.]*

Not all criticism of Israel has to be ascribed to anti-Semites, proterrorists, or Holocaust deniers; the regrettable aspect about current protest demonstrations is that Jews ourselves do not come to grips with the moral issues involved in the present attack on Gaza and make our voices heard. Somehow, to criticize Israel is to betray Judaism and, given the close identification between Israel and the U.S., to appear unpatriotic to America. Yet, this Israel right-or-wrong attitude (and the latter is seldom admitted) forces us to rethink a blanket endorsement of Israeli actions and policies in light of the current situation.

Does the Times have the courage to acknowledge the evidence of its own reporters, or will it censor opinions it deems objectionable, even when they meet its guidelines of reasoned discourse? In today’s edition we read that the Israeli ground offensive was made “under cover of heavy air, tank, and artillery fire”. We also read that five civilians were killed and many wounded “on Sunday morning when Israeli shells or rockets landed in the market of Gaza City while people were stocking up on supplies.” Consider the import of these words! The Israeli firing has been indiscriminate, that is, geared to terrorizing a population, while necessarily inflicting death and destruction on, yes, human beings. When Ehud Barak states that Israelis are peace-givers, and when the public-relations machinery of the security cabinet, IDF, and IAF, in concert, proclaim that every measure is being taken to avoid civilian casualties, I want to puke at the outrageous self-deception, if not outright lies, being practiced. Artillery is not a precision instrument. Aerial bombardment is the method of choice when you want to dehumanize the victim and desensitize the self to gross acts of dealing death.

I believe that all Jews must stand up to the barbarism being committed in our name. Israel should not be allowed to have it both ways: to call itself a Jewish state, and, when shown that its actions



violate the teachings of the Torah, to shrug off the point and say that Israel is a secular political entity. Israel hides behind Judaism, while contaminating Judaism's wellsprings of moral conduct.

Primo Levi, for one, said that the Holocaust should teach Jews compassion. The most profound human tragedy in modern history has been trivialized, played with, indeed transmogrified, to give license to those acting in its name to become barbaric warriors in their turn.

*[6. NYT, 1/16/2009. Times call for cease fire too late. Indiscriminate killing; absence of outrage.]*

The Times writes that "we fear the assault on Gaza has passed the point of diminishing returns." Perfect. Nothing could better illustrate the callousness which press and public opinion have displayed about Israeli conduct, despite the overwhelming evidence of atrocities committed by Israel against the civilian population of Gaza (including dispatches and photographs The Times itself has published). The point of diminishing returns—a neat, antiseptic formulation drawn from sterile economic theory—serves to legitimate the death and destruction inflicted by Israel in the first twenty days. Only when The Times and Israel alike realize that the flagrant attack on a UN building to which large numbers of civilians have fled has become a public relations disaster, NOT a human rights violation, is the call issued for a cease fire. Too late, too late; the point of diminishing returns had already set in on Day 1 of the invasion, when it became clear that the weaponry employed would result in indiscriminate killing.

Perhaps I am too harsh on The Times, for, in truth, much of the world also remained silent, indifferent, or actually in favor of Israeli action. To say we are in an age of denial is perhaps too charitable; jadedness, mixed with a strain of nihilism, seems closer to the truth. The Times has its finger on the pulse; it is no better and no worse than the state of contemporary feeling.

Only, I expect more from a great newspaper. I expected indignation when it became clear that children, in particular, were being killed, sometimes as "collateral damage," sometimes in cold blood (reports of Israeli soldiers shooting point blank at youngsters, as confirmed by the location of their wounds). I expected outrage when it was reported that Israeli soldiers stood outside destroyed buildings as dying people, calling for help, were buried in the rubble. I looked for some sign of forthrightness when the moral dimensions of the tragedy were made known. Instead, we have the standard fallback position: forget the killing, let's return to normal. The call for a cease fire is exonerative, a moral pat on the back.

FEBRUARY 8, 2013

### **Democracy on Trial**

The Memo released this week legitimating political murder is a farce, were it not a serious cover-up of extreme violations of international law and the profound negation of human decency. We thought John Yoo's apologia for torture in the Bush II administration was egregious, and that the Office of Legal Counsel was like a cancerous cell (as well as cell of rightwing zealots rubber-stamping whomever called the shots); but this takes the cake, anonymous in authorship, the Memo—its parentage still enshrouded in secrecy, thanks to Obama's fanaticism about the National Security State—dodges every major question one expects from a forthright declaration of

government policy. Of course, why expect more? And its release—a carefully planned “leak.” Not some brilliant, forceful reporting by NBC, but timed to precede John Brennan’s Senate testimony, as if, somehow, its content would make everything o.k., answer all doubts, and let the administration come out smelling like a rose.

No, Brennan, perhaps more than ever (I’m sure he vetted the Memo’s every word), comes off as an ICC (International Criminal Court) poster boy, from heightened interrogation to Svengalian promotion of the obliteration of fellow humans, to (next chapter) chief cyber warrior, always with the president’s ear, not that Obama needs much coaxing in these or other foreign- and military-policy areas, particularly the vastly expanded dependence on the CIA in issuing it a licence to kill (something his other favorite JSOC does not yet enjoy).

What’s wrong with the Memo, in addition to its baseness and stupidity (not even worthy of a bright right-wing law clerk)? It includes the phrase “associated forces” so much that an “af” abbreviation would do—the phrase so nebulous as to take in anyone who criticizes the United States, such as yours truly or every CP writer, provided at least two are found together—otherwise, a mere assassination of an individual deemed an imminent threat to the US. “Imminent” is a catchy word—ready to strike the homeland. Must be struck down immediately. And “associated,” we’ve come far since McCarthyism, when “fellow traveler” was sufficient to scare to death the beloved heartland. Now, without definition, refinement, logic, proof, we call forth “associated” in order to keep alive the general fear, justify the assassinations, and keep the defense budget on overdrive—as the social safety net is squashed.

Equally intriguing is the continued reference to the nonimportance of geographical boundaries. Man, this is total war—all previous notions of international law and the laws of war, out the window, we’ve never faced such a dire threat before!!! And don’t let the courts interfere; they don’t know what we know. (And they aren’t the superpatriots we are.) This is man’s work. Terrorists could be everywhere (under every bed) disguised as labor organizers, antiwar activists, social workers taking their responsibility to their clients too seriously—all commies under the skin. That’s why we have the Espionage Act, a Siamese twin to the counterterrorism legislation. Stop parsing our Memos, we’re too clever by far for you.

And killing Americans? They deserve it. The Bill of Rights was never meant to protect criminals, much less terrorists. And if these so-called Americans are right here at home, that changes nothing, because we have already juridically established that national boundaries are a nonstarter. God Bless America. Assassination is as American as apple pie. Or so the implied reasoning of the Memo goes. What is not implied, however, is the grab for executive power, in theory, dangerous, in Obamaean practice, doubly so, because directed to the worst features of government: targeted assassination, surveillance, paramilitary operations, covert—just about everything, perhaps of longest-term significance, absolute contempt for the law, whether now, death-from-the-skies with no shred of habeas corpus, substantive accusations, right of counsel, death expeditiously conducted (many times without knowing the victims’ identities), or more ghoulish, purely for the sake of terrorizing whole civilian populations (as in the well-documented “secondary strikes” on funerals and first responders).

When a practice or program is so vile, and should not have been contemplated, much less adopted, in the first place, the time has come to abandon it immediately and cleanly. The obvious

starting point, with or without its cancellation, is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to flesh out, document, publicize, and prepare for prosecution WAR CRIMES, abundantly evident, despite the desperate demand for secrecy and treating government as the exclusive domain of the Executive, and within that, the nexus of presidential-military power, a litany of shared goals and methods, to be pursued without restraint, from unilateral global dominance to, specifically, itching for confrontation with China, if for no other reason, to keep alive the climate and custom of perpetual war fueling counterterrorism as a pretext for antilabor, probanker, antienvironmental conformity. The country goes to hell in a handbasket, confident in its moral standing—curiously, as things go, the armed drone acting as the linchpin for the total framework to be operable, convincing, rational (from the perverted standard of keeping the class structure intact and letting the profits flow from the top, percolating only so far down).

The question is, What is worse, a war criminal running the government, or a people blandly, placidly, even adoringly accepting that? Further, why must there be notice taken only when Americans are killed? Are we so provincial, parochial, nay, xenophobic, authoritarian, not to recognize that all human life is precious, that every individual is entitled to live in security and free from sudden, arbitrary death? One cannot get sucked into the mindset of the memo writers and war-crime enablers, much less the Obama-Brennan gang at the top meeting on Terror Tuesdays in the White House, deciding on the life or death (invariably the latter) of those on the hit list, with their lame justifications for the globalization of murder. Why play the legalese game, as though the words of the Memo were written in authoritative stone, when in reality the Executive writes what it wants, to create the presumption of legality. At the moment, Executive Power is going through the roof. We get cute answers to or perfunctory dismissal of flagrant violations to the 4th, 5th, and 14th Amendments, as though the Constitution was of no account, and that underlying the fundamental objections raised to the violations was not what we know to be true: antecedently, state-sponsored murder. Period.

Assassination comes in many varieties and forms, none of them compatible with democratic principles or the rule of law. Israel is skilled with the gun and plastique, the US with heavier armaments. Failure of disclosure (the original legal memos remain classified, not the outrageous p.r. job just released), failure of admission (we do not admit the identity and scope of casualties), and failure of confiding in the public (geopolitical strategy is not subject to debate, or for that matter, revealment), all strongly suggest that the secrecy, stubbornness, and, in abdicating government's responsibility to the people, villany, have for their purpose the desperate avoidance of being discovered for what we as a nation have become, and our leaders in particular, perpetrators of war crimes.

The question persists: Why this “breaking news” about the death of Americans, as though we are blind to humanity? I should like nothing better than to see—the impossible: America handing over Obama and Brennan to the ICC, thus purging the venom from our sysyem (aka our capitalist system) and learn to live in an harmonious world of peace and justice. I would settle, however, for much less: a national campaign to petition the Nobel Committee to rescind the Peace prize. Ain't gonna happen; meanwhile, more drones, assassinations, violation of top-to-bottom law, and the normalization of continued attempts, increasingly unilateral, to maintain across-the-board dominance, political, economic, military, cultural, ideological, whatever our designated mad men think right. More Memos of Self-Justification.

*[My Comment to today's (Feb. 6, 2013) New York Times editorial wherein I make a timely suggestion]:*

“This dispute goes to the fundamental nature of our democracy....” Yes. But The Times drifts off by calling for a special court, etc., rather than saying, armed drones for targeted assassination is per se antithetical to a democracy and that the program must be stopped as a national disgrace and extreme violation of international and national law. Assassination is an affront to human decency. Yet this is Obama’s signature weapon and policy. We are seeing the expansion of UNCHECKED executive power like never before. Your article on cyber warfare just yesterday bears that out.

You may think it irresponsible, but I shall call, not from the lunatic right, but, placing civil liberties at the heart of a democratic system, for Obama’s impeachment. He has sullied and falsified America through cold-blooded actions, a political hustler and con artist, revealing, stripped of liberal veneer, a moral void, profound, deep, incapable of political leadership except that of dragging the US further into the slime of war, intervention, drones, collateral damage, denial, and, the crowning touch, nomination of John O. Brennan, evil incarnate, Strangelovian beyond what fiction depicts, from torture to drones to cyber war, a smooth continuum of death, destruction, denial (in his case, of civilian casualties).

Obama-Brennan, forever locked in embrace, each deserving of the other, from Nobel Laureate to War Criminal without missing a step, and his sidekick, covering his back.

FEBRUARY 11, 2013

### **A Drone Court to Legitimize Assassination**

Soon Brennan will be confirmed, an Obama-Brennan, Brennan-Obama, Obrennan-Brenoma government which merely compounds the grab for Executive Power already underway, to the prejudice of the US Constitution and flatout affront to humankind’s moral sensibility (presently in short supply in America). Events move fast, assisted by Gresham’s Law of evil doings which foster a progressively intensifying race to the bottom.

Drone warfare for targeted assassination, slice it any way you want, is Naziism déjà vu all over again [thanks, Yogi], the London blitz in microcosm, the terrorization of a whole people—a war crime, pure and simple, originating at the highest levels of political authority, watched over more or less complacently by the Congress and the American public. To have a special court scrutinizing (I’m being charitable) each application for the use of lethal force, is a macabre joke—US justice rather than safeguard the law has been in the vanguard of transmogrifying it, to suit a priori Reactionary goals and purposes and/or a national-interest doctrine compatible with US global hegemonic claims, perhaps more than ever being pursued and contested in a multipolar world (which places a seemingly unbearable strain on American institutions unused to experiencing challenges).

Murder from the skies is a (last) desperate attempt to instill fear and respect into an international arena in which counterterrorism is an excuse for something else: to remain unmodified at home (drastic maldistribution of wealth and power), while simultaneously attempting to stabilize the world system on lines advantageous to American capital, itself undergoing transformation into a

capitalistic framework, monopoly capital at a highly mature stage, perhaps qualitatively different from the past, although the signs were there since perhaps the close of World War II. I speak of the militarization *and* financialization of American capitalism, which makes a more aggressive foreign policy, particularly foreign *economic* policy, both attractive and imperative, and with drone warfare as suitable illustration, realizable. We are seeing the logic of counterterrorism unfold, its purposeful incorporation on a political-ideological continuum with counterrevolution.

Brennan is our point man; soon all of America will be waterboarded, with Obama, glibness, ersatz liberalism all polished, teleprompter at the ready, smiling his condescending smile in the wings. I add my Comment in yesterday's *New York Times* on the discussion of a special court:

*[NYT, Comment, 2/9/13. The court a rubber stamp for unconstitutional practices]*

Either targeted assassination is legally and morally justified, or it is not. I believe it is not, and to invoke a FISA-like court to pass on drone warfare merely legitimates a practice which, under any circumstance, is reprehensible, the violation of international law, and—if one must be practical—wholly counterproductive. Just say, No.

The discussion has several fundamental flaws, indicative of where we, as a nation, currently are (i.e., falling into a moral void, in which the Constitution itself is openly violated without the slightest misgivings). First, the courts, including that set up under FISA, have lost their way, starting at the top. American justice has been politicized beyond what is acceptable, much less believable. Your point on FISA: 2011, 1,745-0 record of approval on surveillance, with 30 alterations! The court obviously has become a rubber stamp for unconstitutional practices. Why should a drone court be different? It only would serve to legitimate rotten practices.

Second, why does justice stop at water's edge? Is murdering a foreign national any less heinous than murdering an American? Shame on those who want to limit such a court to assassination of Americans—parochial and xenophobic. Third, we face unbridled Executive Power, yet that is not addressed in the discussion. The whole drone program should be scrapped, its proponents, from Obama down, reigned in, as now in WAR CRIMES territory. Assassination is a moral outrage. Period.

FEBRUARY 12, 2013

### **The Blood Spat President**

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau provides a window into the Obama mindset, as though hurtling down a laundry chute to the bowels of the earth—his one-way passage to a moral void, as in every avenue of policymaking to which he puts his hand. The familiar refrain, "Republicans are obstructionist," echoed in today's *New York Times* editorial (Feb. 11), as explanation for why so little has been achieved on this front, suggests both that Democrats protesteth too much, to hide their own villainy (i.e., complicity in savaging working people, on behalf of bipartisan unity in forging the advanced stage of monopoly capitalism) and the *Times* itself goes only ten yards up the field in its attempt to protect Obama at all costs—including the truth.

There cannot be consumer financial protection until and unless:

- a) a democratization of the banking system removes the means and incentive for preying on the consumer;
- b) the extreme wealth concentration rooted in part in the selfsame system (wealth is increasingly an interlocking phenomenon, so one must give “credit” as well to other sources, equally vulture-like in relation to the public, from defense contractors to health insurers, and not just banking and the whole vista of financial chicanery and manipulation) must be taken down, by whatever means necessary consistent with nonviolent measures (let’s start with avowedly confiscatory taxation rates and closing ALL loopholes, then putting banks in a straitjacket to keep them honest, the minimum, Glass-Steagall;
- c) freeing the consumer from the bondage of a parasitical culture, as so many flies drawn to flypaper (Marx), which might begin with truth-in-advertising (today a headsplitting contradiction) and exposure of the credit-card industry, followed by the enforcement of strict health-and-safety standards, from foods to automobiles, and, on the latter, additional taxes on luxury accessories.

These exceedingly small changes are nonetheless of boat-rocking proportions, wholly anathema to capitalism—and equally so, regrettably, to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which, at best, will be a wrist-slapping exercise, under Obama’s auspices, that serves to protect and legitimate offenders (the value of the government imprimatur in all present regulatory operations) rather than criminalize their behavior and remove their products.

Why my dim view, of what should be a salutary effort? Here as elsewhere, Obama has imposed a paradigm of *deregulation* on government as part of the so-called liberation of wealth under the principles of market fundamentalism. Regulation, with some exceptions in the New Deal, has from its modern inception in the Bureau of Corporations (T. Roosevelt) and the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Reserve System (Wilson) been a creature of the interests presumably to be regulated, for the purpose of resolving internal difficulties and contradictions—e.g., internecine competition—they have brought upon themselves, yet could not resolve through private means, or the straightout purpose of encouraging monopolism (under the flag of virtue, capitalist stability).

Regulation under capitalism, at least the US variant, is a sham, the consumer (as often also the worker) being the least important factor under consideration. Obama, even jumping forward to 1980 (and decades of business-government copartnership reducing regulation to an empty phrase), is the heir to Reagan and Clinton in particular, a synthesis of corporatism shilled by an ole’boy Arkansas twang, an unbeatable “aw shucks” moment in history, with such regular guys as Robert Rubin on guitar, in a steady march to the evisceration of government and its replacement by what was affectionately termed by the NAM and the US Chamber of Commerce in the ‘twenties, the *business commonwealth*, a privatization demiurge moving to the doorsteps of fascism pure and simple.

But why Obama? Answers do not come easily. The experience of open treachery masked in affability is rare at the upper levels of state power, as though the iron fist were wrapped—in time for Easter—in a bunny muff, fuzzy, comforting, but muff or no muff, the fist itself has plenty of clout. As in conducting a Sherman’s March through the regulatory agencies. How expect anything from Consumer Financial Protection, when—ah, you may not grant interrelatedness of fundamental policy, but what happens at Interior or the SEC consistently is exhibited across the board, in this

case, a rush to the lowest common denominator—oil drilling leases hit a new high, hedge fund operations are still, along with exotic financial instruments, on a roller-coaster ride, and environmental protection is transvalued into license to despoil and worse, from industrial pollutants to assaults on the land.

Why the Brennans, Geithners, Salazars, except that Obama backs their activities to the hilt—not because of Republican anything, but because he *favors* the Right on every indicator I’ve seen, pliable, sure, caving in, no, for the simple reason that one cannot be said to *cave* when one already desires the outcome. No-one has a gun to his head when he drastically enlarges the CIA’s functions, and when he makes paramilitary action a tool of provocation in the achievement of international goals. No-one holds him hostage to the modernization of nuclear weaponry (which makes a mockery of his reduction of nuclear forces, since the point is to make the remaining stock more LETHAL, with the next generation of weapons in the pipeline). No-one blackmails him into blatant cosiness with all sorts of groups his supporters, were they not blind, would find objectionable: Wall Street, the intelligence community, his present darling, the Joint Special Ops Command (JSOC), pharmaceutical giants, in sum, a Who’s Who of American Reaction.

So be it. We will not wake up. And, for me, the armed drone for targeted assassination says it all—including the abysmal state of American public opinion, which condones—no, applauds—the strikes. Obama, President of the Blood Spat, which is all that is left, where once stood a fellow human being, when struck by a drone missile.

I include here my Comment to the *Times* (Feb. 11), which itself remains purposefully obtuse on its editorial page, but not the work of its investigative reporters, especially on national-security and financial matters, to Obama’s record:

The CFPB deserves protection. Undoubtedly Republicans have been responsible for preventing the appointment of a director. But it was Obama who first crippled the Bureau by refusing to appoint Elizabeth Warren as its head. Why always blame that party’s intransigence when daily evidence mounts that Obama has been a foe of regulation, whether financial services, oil drilling, climate change, etc.? He doesn’t deserve a free pass here or across the policy spectrum. The *Times*’s reporters have shown this to be a failed presidency—yet the editorial page persists in one-sided accounts of accountability.

Obama’s nomination of Brennan to CIA should alert one to the moral bankruptcy of Obama, a point equally applicable to consumer protection, assassination, job creation, wherever the public interest is at stake yet shot down. Obama’s market assumptions conflict with the CFPB mission. When you assess blame, why not also ask: What of Obama’s treatment of Paul Volcker, the most respected financial figure in America? And why hasn’t Joseph Stiglitz been brought on the team?

Please wean yourself from one-party bashing to appreciate how both major parties are implicated in the financial swindle of the American people. Also show courage in addressing the record, beginning perhaps with failure to fight for the reinstatement of Glass-Steagall and the incredible sham of the health care legislation, which benefited only the health insurance industry and Big Pharma.

FEBRUARY 13, 2013

## **Bread and Circuses at the State of the Union**

The 2008 hoax has been repeated, successfully it would appear (given the sanctification bestowed on Obama's performance last night by the *New York Times*), despite a four-year record, ranging from zero to absolute negation, on every policy approach raised by the speech. The friend of government? Yes, in its militaristic dimensions; yes, in its protection of major corporations, banks, hedge funds, etc., *from* its supposed charge of regulation; yes, in its pursuit of international (but not American) reputation for moral turpitude—how else characterize assassination?

But government as dedicated to the public welfare, government, embodiment of the principle of equality, government, vehicle for and guardian of societal democratization affecting class structure, distribution of wealth and power, business regulation, not on your life; quite the opposite, government, under Obama, as the public teat for corporate wealth, an image from the Gilded Age brought back to life, more blatant than ever.

Blatant, objectively, disguised beyond recognition, subjectively, so great the persuasiveness of liberal rhetoric in a society based on the destruction of political consciousness and critical awareness. Obama, publicist for the spoliation of America on behalf of its ruling groups extraordinaire.

What did the speech offer? A tribute to the "Middle Class" which, by its very designation, obfuscates the political-economic landscape of, first, an actual *working*, not middle, *class*, assuming its members are lucky enough to have jobs, second, structural poverty, from long-term unemployment to stagnant wages to first-timers seeking to enter the labor force to no avail, and third, even for those previously in the middle class, a decline of living standards via loss of home, equity therein, and savings, again when un- and under-employment hits—all of the above, as the incomes of the wealthiest skyrocket out of the picture. The State of the Union is really, the State of the (Bifurcated) Union, not Republican, Democrat, not red states, blue states, but, simply, the union of great wealth and the societal remainder, gradations here a matter of statistical convenience, but concentration at the top—hence the accuracy of the phrase "ruling groups"—at what is surely at or near an all-time high.

Let Obama chant about the middle class and "growing" the economy; the reality is, and will remain, underconsumption and undemocratic wealth sharing. Universal prekindergarten? Another phony, if Chicago be our model of "education reform," in which Arne Duncan has fulfilled the two Obama priorities in that policy area: more charter schools and the weakening of the teachers' union, a neat package which comes under the heading of privatization.

Research Institutes? Wonderful, but an actual drop in the bucket measured against the depth of unemployment (I include those who have given up, and are no longer counted in the labor force). And as for the remainder—why the SILENCE for four years, in fact, speak of Republican obstructionism, here is Obama doing the obstructing—as, for example, climate change, gun control, oil drilling, environmental protection in general, even the suddenly-discovered irregularities of the voting process?

Democrats stood on cue, Republicans similarly, sitting, as though America were torn apart by ideological cleavage, when in reality it is only this tightly-wound Rightist formation, including both



sides, in which differences in kind become magnified as qualitative differences. Fundamental agreement holds on, obviously, capitalism, but also, within capitalism, deference to the big guns, the rejection of progressive taxation, facilitation of monopolization and consolidation generally, a labor policy prejudicial to organization and militance, “friendly,” not adversarial, regulation, and so on.

And in foreign policy, the provision of whatever it takes to keep capitalism as *the* world system, whatever it takes for unrestricted market penetration, whatever it takes for supremacy in trade rivalries—these in addition to the biggies of foreign policy in which Democrats seem particularly motivated to support: counterrevolution in the Third World, intervention, to secure strongholds region-by-region, and counterterrorism (Democrats, under Obama-Brennan, can claim ownership over targeted assassination, more so than Bush II), to keep alive the spirit of conformity and consent, as the machinery of permanent war ticks on, to both parties’ satisfaction.

As stage-managed events go, the speech went over well. It represented a blueprint for four more years of creative accounting, more in the spirit of Exxon, A.I.G., and Goldman, than the actual programs of the New Deal, such as CCC, WPA, PWA, all anathema to those last night—from the top down—supposedly favoring a positive role for government. And don’t forget those who experience genuine tragedy in the death of loved ones as shooting victims, yet are mercilessly trotted out for exhibition to demonstrate Obama the caring president—despite by his personal authorization more children have been murdered through drone attacks (regrettable “collateral damage”) than in all the gun massacres for some time. Verily, manipulation, thy name is Obama.

My Comments to the *New York Times* follow, the first, written before the State of the Union, concerns, among other things, the North Korean nuclear test (timing probably not coincidental) Obama would presumably address, and the second, following the speech, which seemed to me consistent with his effort to bamboozle the public while hewing to a conservative-reactionary course:

*[New York Times Comment I, Feb. 12, 2013. Corporate ascendancy and aggressive foreign policy]*

North Korea’s nuclear test was a “provocative” act, but no more than, and perhaps in response to, the Obama-Brennan program, currently in the foreground of US foreign and military policy, of armed drones for targeted assassination. Obama has given us bounteous examples of liberal rhetoric before, all to no avail—not because of Republican intransigence, but because he doesn’t favor government-supported job creation, economic stimuli, and a strengthened social safety net.

Sen. Rubio can praise “free enterprise” and carp at Obama’s alleged progovernment stance, but the truth is, Obama, like Clinton before him, and a Democratic party slavishly enthralled to both, is the champion of deregulation, corporate ascendancy in American life, and an aggressive foreign policy which centers on drone warfare as part of a global paramilitary posture, complemented by the heavy hand of his Pacific-first strategy to contain and isolate China.

(Some) troops out of Afghanistan, to pursue a Far-East encirclement policy via nuclear diplomacy (the Armitage mission to Japan to encourage nuclear armament as part of confronting China), military alliances in the region, and the “pivot” of military hardware and personnel to the new theater.

After earning his stripes as The Assassination President, who will take him seriously tonight in the State of the Union address? Gullible Americans, but not the rest of the world. Assassination is not a mark of constructive leadership.

*[New York Times Comment II, Feb. 13, 2013. A reality of human suffering]*

As a nation we have again been taken in, the political schmaltz of liberal rhetoric wedded to a previous four-year record of; a) the militarization and financialization of American capitalism; b) an all-out campaign of aggression via armed drones for targeted assassination squarely in the realm of war crimes; c) a pattern of deregulation which mocks his plea for a rising middle class (proportionately, a sinking three-quarters in relation to the upper one-quarter); and d) near-absolute silence until now on gun control, climate change, infrastructure, meaningful job creation and foreclosure relief. In sum, a con man up to his old tricks, meanwhile conducting business-as-usual with respect to assassination, placating and expanding the function of the CIA, pivoting US forces to Asia (Pacific-first strategy) to force confrontation with China, and appointments, e.g., John Brennan, which invalidate all liberal rhetoric by the contempt shown civil liberties and the rule of law.

Obama offers crumbs; whether his less-government address affects the secrecy, his personal obsession, of whatever remains, is doubtful. He is running a National Security State—surveillance et. al.—not even noticed by the present chorus of approval. Wall Street has sense enough not to appear gleeful. Defense contractors, health insurers, Big Pharma, ditto. However, the rosy report on putting the hard times behind us flatly contradicts a reality of human suffering in America, if anyone cared to look.

FEBRUARY 18, 2013

### **Obama's Carnival of Fraud**

The big picture is clear, from drone warfare as escalation of sought-after global US military hegemony to the trivialization and evisceration of government's regulatory functions, all pointing to a business-as-usual continuation of policies and practices going back, regardless of party, at least to Reagan. In fact, Obama appears to have made a qualitative leap beyond his predecessors on several fronts: developing a more aggressive foreign policy to rekindle a Cold War beginning to diminish in intensity as Russia's quite moribund socialism already showed evidence of collapse, and in its place the so-called *pivot* of American forces and geopolitical interest from Europe to Asia, with China in the crosshairs as absolutely essential to justify massive defense expenditures, military alliances and interventions along the periphery, and, in its own right, the isolation and containment of China itself (as in its trade and investment activities in Latin America and Africa); and domestically, the patently helpful assistance *via regulation* to banking, financial services, defense contractors, health insurance, oil, pharmaceuticals, ad nauseum—regulatory protection, in the guise of the genuine article, to fend off legislation (not in any case forthcoming) and to establish the privileged status actually accorded, both by legislation (e.g., health care) and executive department action (e.g., Interior and deepwater drilling in the Gulf and opening the North Slope). The Carnival of Fraud has been invaluable, as well, on the third front, the changing character of American society. The virtue of acquiescence in the destruction of the public sector, and, soon, not far behind, the social safety net, is that a selfless patriotism can be harnessed on behalf of business consolidations to enrich the

organizers and insiders in the belief that a steeply hierarchical framework of society, in which each *class* finds its place, conduces to the general welfare and most probably adheres to God's plan of just rewards (the rich naturally being more meritorious, and therefore closer to the Divine Being), and also confirms the moral-structural paradigm of trickle-down economics. We should be, as apparently we are, eternally grateful to Obama for straightening out the social order so that a numerically small elite—a reasonably cohesive upper stratum, with comprehensive representation from the worlds of business, finance, and the military—can guide us on the path of orderly growth through the next, and hopefully last, stage of monopoly capitalism. Was this always in the cards, nonregulatory regulation, extremes of wealth and poverty, aggressive foreign-policy moves? But of course, certainly, but not, however, with the surefooted application of liberal rhetoric, the democratic glow now bathing public policy as Obama's enchanted base looks on.

Nothing proves dissuasive, neither large-scale unemployment (artfully minimized), as the frosting on the cake of *extreme* inequalities of income, wealth, and power, nor, having Obama's Good Housekeeping seal of approval, armed drones for targeted assassination, as the murderous vehicle of a foreign policy nominally addressed to counterterrorism but, like its Cold War progenitor, really an alternative path to sustaining US unilateralism in a multipolar world (unilateralism, aka, commercial-financial-military supremacy particularly in ensuring capitalism's global potency and long-term security), while also, to demonstrate America's muscularity and firmness of resolve, killing without apology, from the missiles fired, the large number of civilian casualties aptly termed by a depraved mindset "collateral damage." To glory in the maldistribution of wealth and the vaporizing of women, children, males of military age (broadly defined by Obama as "combatants" by virtue of being in a geographical area the US designates peremptorily a war zone—even when no declaration of war exists), attendees at funerals for the victims, and first responders who minister to the wounded, is to bring *unglory* to Old Glory. This seems obvious, but the devil is in the details, or, in cracking the surface to get down to the details—which Obama, in his hostility to transparency, seeks to prevent, while, relatedly, covering his back so as to avoid prosecution for war-crimes and, at home, recognition of malfeasance, misfeasance, and dereliction of public duties.

Consider Gretchen Morgenson's excellent column in the *New York Times* (Feb. 16, 2013), entitled "Don't Blink, or You'll Miss Another Bailout," which shows the protective arm the New York Fed threw around Bank of America in the sweetheart deal to limit the bank's liability in marketing worthless mortgage-backed securities, at the same time seeking to prevent A.I.G. from suing the bank for losses sustained on those securities. The Fed is famously independent from regulation by the remainder of government—yet hardly independent from the banking community it serves. The American public still hasn't learned that regulation is, and was set up to be, *unresponsive* to the public interest; instead regulatory agencies forge working relations with the bodies to be regulated, a national pattern often duplicated on the state and municipal levels. Regulation is the path through the revolving door to remunerative employment in the affected business, industry, or sectoral association. More basic, structurally and ideologically, it has been capitalism's guardian against its own contradictions and the social unrest it sometimes engenders. Capitalism minus regulation in America would vividly appear as a naked source of power having direct control over a compliant State, instead of, as now, power filtered through democratic shibboleths, to the same ends of enrichment and security for business, and the police functions, the better to realize the purposes of the former, for the State. The gimmickry of power and authority is

useful in lulling the citizenry into believing the State, far from being a class-state, actually is there to achieve and maintain the public welfare. Its cohabitation with business rests on the mutual pleasure of both.

Morgenson writes that bank bailouts “are still going on, if more quietly, through the back door.” Is this Obama’s responsibility? Sure. The Fed’s independence is an artful dodge, providing deniability to the Executive and secrecy so that investigation of its policies and activities, especially with respect to its chief clientage, not the public, but the member banks, will not occur. Obama’s appointment of Geithner signaled the message to all concerned that banks and the system protecting them enjoyed the status of privileged sanctuaries. Mega-banks, particularly so, no matter their behavior and practices, because it had become an article of faith in Obama’s White House that banking was the fountainhead of economic growth, juicing as it did the trickle-down framework of wealth accumulation. Morgenson writes: “That the New York Fed would shower favors on a big financial institution may not surprise. It has *long shielded large banks from assertive regulation* and increased capital requirements.” (Italics, mine) The concept of the “shield,” stated By Gabriel Kolko in *Triumph of Conservatism* a half-century ago, still has not gained traction, so desperately do we want to think of government as acting on behalf of the public rather than the corporate order. The New York Fed and Bank of America, she continues, struck a “secret deal” last July which “came to light just last week in court filings.” The “undisclosed settlement” typifies current practice, similarly, Obama’s own failure to acknowledge civilian casualties from drone attacks or the expansion of naval power and military bases in implementing the Pacific-first strategy, which speaks volumes about the disjunction between government and the American people.

What the New York Fed did was to “thwart another institution’s fraud case against the bank,” and it also “agreed to give away what may be billions of dollars in potential legal claims.” Regulation is its own negation. The Fed released B.of A. “from all legal claims arising from losses in some mortgage-backed securities the Fed received when the government bailed out” A.I.G. in 2008. And, as part of A.I.G.’s case, the Fed let the bank “off the hook even as A.I.G. was seeking to recover \$7 billion in losses on those very mortgage securities.” The rest, she writes, only “gets better,” i.e., more favors, more obstruction to B. of A. claimants, more razzle-dazzle on the Fed’s part concerning an entity, Maiden Lane II, to deny payments, switches of jurisdiction, “pennies on the dollar” settlements, every trick in the book to provide a *shield* behind which the bank could receive protection. Coincidentally, above the article, on the Internet edition, there was a paid advertisement for Obama entitled “Fireside Hangouts,” inviting the reader to a Google location where the president would answer questions. This sucking up to FDR, whose Fireside Chats were not flimflam, is an example of the emphasis placed on subterfuge and propaganda in the selling of administration policy. Fraud mortises the structure of banking policy—the legacy of both parties, the Democrats more adept, however, in creating a carnival atmosphere, while the Republicans, stone-deaf to the requirements of international capitalism, merely march forward to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which even then knew better.

FEBRUARY 20, 2013

## Liberal Fascism in America

Is liberal fascism a misnomer? Perhaps Sinclair Lewis's antecedent question is more basic, Can it happen here?

Fascism comes in several varieties without losing its distinctive structural-ideological-political features, all of which point to an hierarchical societal framework characterized by extremes of wealth and power, a system of government authority, its opaqueness shielding it from accountability in both domestic and foreign policy, and, because of its secrecy, able to hide its disconnection from the public interest, as for example a dereliction of responsibility to the working class in terms of job creation, the preservation of the social safety net, and adequate funding for public education, and meanwhile, able as well to hide its *connection*, rather, to ruling groups and upper social strata through beneficial economic and fiscal policies, subsidies, the wider geopolitical strategies for wealth accumulation in international affairs, and the protective cover of military strength and involvement to preserve order and a martial spirit at home and trade and investment opportunities abroad—ensuring the resultant generation of wealth will *not* be channeled inward to democratize the social order.

Prevention of democratization at home, unilateral exercise of dominance on all major indices of power and a broad counterrevolutionary posture abroad, pretty well sums up the paradigm of fascism in a skeletal form, its methods varying to suit historical circumstances and cultural tastes, repression in some cases, persuasion and a promotion of false consciousness in others, so long as the basic objectives are served: inequality, secrecy, militarism (all, under Obama, brought to fruition via the warm glow of rhetorical liberalism).

Liberal fascism is an elusive historical formation; instead of goosestepping automatons, gas chambers, Stuka dive bombers, the bombastic Leader, all is *normality* on display, although, to be sure, some traces of the nonliberal variety of fascism remain.

For goosesteppers substitute the seemingly more innocuous militarization of the total culture, under constant reinforcement, with Second-Amendment gun-rights zealots rubbing their hardware in our noses.

For gas chambers substitute the structural reinforcement of gun violence, incarceration of an underclass, surveillance—admittedly far less painful, but expeditious in its social-control consequences.

For the Stukas, we actually go one better, with armed drones for targeted assassination, directed to terrorizing, as did the Stukas along with the closer analogue, buzz bombs, whole populations.

And for the bombastic Leader, we have the reformer *manque*, blithely at work in planning and executing assassination, smiling all the while and, now, advertising his “Fireplace Hangouts” in a phony effort to imitate FDR's Fireside Chats.

Even were large numbers of individuals the victims of political murder abstracted from the record, there would still be ample grounds for treating the presidential context as the flourishing of liberal fascism. Militarism, beyond drones, beyond the global network of bases, beyond extravagant budgets and exotic weaponry, beyond expanding the role of CIA operations, beyond the Pacific-

first strategy of enlarging the US presence in Asia and containment of China, is alive and well in the Obama White House through a grand design of permanent war carried on largely by *paramilitary* forces with the heavy hitters, viz., supercarriers, etc., in the background, and the “modernized” nuclear weapons gently out of sight.

Still, liberal fascism requires more, given that America has been in the business of counterrevolution, militarism, and intervention for some time, as it has, through government-business interpenetration, in support of monopolism and economic consolidation generally.

Now, however, is qualitatively different, or rather, the intensification of previous key trends, with still less protest than perhaps at any time since 1933. In broadest terms, America *has absorbed its own negativity*, and by America I mean a culmination of tendencies toward the systemic integration of capitalism, now at a mature stage of development, and correlative mechanisms of support, previously inchoate or less operant, starting with the bludgeoning of a radical political consciousness through several decades of applied public and private pressures toward conformity: i.e., internalized boundaries of acceptable doctrine and modes of protest.

Obama can begin from where the long-term formation of a dissipative consciousness leaves off, extolling “change” as the formula for acquiescence—submission to authority, war, assassination, bank bailouts, military budgets, false either-or alternatives in social policy, whatever it takes to keep the ship of, not state, but monopoly capitalism, on course. Why *liberal*? Because rhetoric trumps reality, and the attachment of leader and led is bound up in an apolitical moral vacuum, affecting each, altogether resistant to critical thinking and analysis.

Yet more, liberalism has itself demonstrated its bankruptcy, as when, for example, a *majority* of the American people support the armed drone program. Assassination is cost-effective in protecting America from the Nefarious Other.

Whether we had created the conditions of international hostility to the US, is unthinkable. Better to plod ahead. Draw together in classless harmony. Celebrate America as the Land of Opportunity, as societal dislocation proceeds apace, whether unemployment, foreclosures, renditions, torture, nonregulation, crumbling infrastructure, gun rampages, or presidential unctiousness papering over war crimes, wealth concentration, and destruction of the environment.

Keystone XL, anyone?

Addendum: I commend Obama, though, for exposing liberalism, in its journey of transvaluation, from the New Deal to the present, for what it is, a right-of-center political-ideological position hardly worthy of the name, as understood during the New Deal. Liberalism, once centrist, or moderately left of center, could not withstand—nor even try to—the anticommunist hysteria beginning with McCarthyism in the aftermath of World War II, becoming increasingly, as with Americans for Democratic Action and National Security Democrats, part of the red-baiting political-ideological universe of cultural discourse translated into a marked rightward shift in politics which distinguished the major parties solely on who was fairest of them all (i.e., most patriotic).

Under the liberal banner, the US ventured into the Cold War arena. Its anticommunism became a spacious umbrella for sacrificing dissent on the altar of respectability, so that by the 1960s at the

latest, liberalism should have been, but was not, detected for being more antiradical than progressive (and, in fact, rendering so-called progressivism as, at bottom, antiradical). Obama could have stepped forward two decades earlier without missing a beat, from a policy- if not racial-standpoint, and his conservatizing thrust has now touched race, with blacks in prominent positions firmly installed in the Praetorian Guard of Vested Interests. Neither Paul Robeson nor Dr. King would be admissible in the political culture of today (lip-service to the celebration of the latter notwithstanding, in light of his Poor People's Campaign and opposition to war).

Liberalism has been a chief contaminant of democratic theory and practice, joined at the hip to a Democratic party solicitous of Wall Street and the whole flock of interests defining predatory capitalism, from health insurers to defense contractors, and further joined at the hip to a White House that can find no better exemplification of its stewardship than the nomination of John Brennan, closing tightly the circle of secrecy so as to hide the practically daily exhibit of war crimes.

FEBRUARY 22, 2013

### **Democrats' Complicity in Political Murder**

Today's *New York Times* (Feb. 21) features an article on White House strategy for pushing through John Brennan's appointment as CIA Director, with a photograph of him standing alongside an admiring Diane Feinstein, aka Madame Apologist for CIA-JSOC Paramilitary Operations, a truly dynamic duo, symbolizing the Executive-Congressional consensus on permanent war through means which makes the garden-variety war criminal's hair stand on edge. America, under Obama, has no precedent in this nation's past; sure, the Bush II-Cheney arrogance and purposeful criminality.

But we expect that. *This* time is different, the liberalization of moral turpitude, not only in foreign-military policies, but also from top to bottom, demonstrating, hopefully even to the obtuse, the charitable, the few authentic liberals and progressives mired in an earlier time-warp, that all policy is interconnected: failure on climate change and murdering children from the skies via an armed drone go together, one not possible without the other.

Worshipping on the altar of deregulation, so that bankers and hedge fund operators can score illegitimate gains in the millions if not billions (while the bottom one-third to one-half in America know want, insecurity, and distress) is also to worship—hardly missing a step—on the altar of militarism, so that CIA can enjoy wider latitude in covert actions, Special Ops can bask in presidential prestige as America's answer to Third World death squads, and the poisons of militarization spread throughout the culture itself.

Mental divestiture from the fakery of Democratic politics-as-usual is the first step to moral sanity. I began writing for CounterPunch with recalling Melville's deeply disturbing short story, "Bartleby the Scrivener, the Story of Wall Street," because then it already appeared clear that Obama, a cardboard creation of market fundamentalism and prowar doctrine and practice, had played treacherously with well-meaning American sympathies for socioeconomic decencies.

Now, even more, he has stepped out of the cardboard to become a fullblown menace in his own right, synthesizing the powers of his creators to put capitalism to the test of its own inner spirit: wealth inequality, a government wedded to the private sector *at the expense of the public interest*, and the criminalization of all dissenting views. At this point, he appears to be succeeding admirably, with a narcotized public still shouting hosannas of praise, and John Brennan, the proud face of an America that can act with impunity at home and abroad on behalf of its most affluent, more familiarly known in an earlier day as the ruling class (although I would settle for C. Wright Mills's "Power Elite").

But to rub salt in the wounds of the affronted, this is not the work of nefarious, imbecilic Republicans, but the straightforward, consciously-realized policy-framework of the Democrats. Bartleby, faced with the selfish corruption of a society that hemmed in its people with the walls of alienation (yes, Melville was brilliant, a century ahead of his time in identifying the moral questions Americans have ever since shoved under the rug), simply and eloquently responded to every entreaty to be sucked in, "I prefer not to."

Today the Bartlebys of this world would be rolled over by the vast construction machinery, the mammoth bulldozers, designed to eliminate the unwanted, to be removed to make way for the hundred-percenters, the patriots, the noble warriors keeping down distant enemies, and .. who knows when, to be turned on those at home.

Obama has a thirst for command, after first placating the military and intelligence communities to the extent of proving his admiration for them—one increasingly reciprocated by those communities. Each decision, portrayed as pragmatic, altogether necessary compromise to get through anything, actually constitutes a consecutive record of achievement in the wrong direction—the further fascisization of the social structure, from a growing concentration of wealth and its corollary, widening differentials of income, status, and power, to the open sesame of capital accumulation fully assisted by not compliant but actively sympathetic government.

I am not one to offer solutions, which, in any case, seem presently under the radar or off the charts. But it would be good to hark back to Bartleby's "I prefer not to," as evidence of washing our hands of pseudoliberalism (never really much to begin with, at least after 1945), spitting in the eye of our would-be democrats, saying, *we see through you*, your wars, your pollution, your contempt for the poor, your prostitution to wealth, your betrayal of the people. And maybe, through the power of example, the negation of political murder, ruthlessness, me-too billionaireism, others will pick up the tune, and someday an awakened people will come into the sun as their earned and proper destiny.

*[Here follows my New York Times Comment (Feb. 21) on the article about White House strategy for Brennan's confirmation. The absolute rejection of Obama:]*

The Feinstein-Brennan photo says it all—how cozy Democrats themselves have come to the table of war crimes, repression, torture, and bow at the waist of their leader, The Assassination President, asking only for a fig leaf to cover their treachery, i.e., the publication of legal memos to justify Obama's barbaric program of political murder, as though these memos, even assuming their existence, could somehow prove exonerative. Eric Holder meet John Yoo; the OLC is rotten to the core. The so-called "leak" to NBC was a contrived act to make Brennan's appearance before Senate Intelligence go more smoothly.



Why even try to reason with Obama supporters, they have abdicated all moral responsibility for a bloodthirsty president and administration, whose Terror Tuesdays are a Mardi Gras celebration of death and the prowess of America's paramilitary operations. International law has been flushed down the toilet. The killing of noncombatants (defined by Obama via specious criteria as combatants), women, children, funeral attendees, first responders, is a deliberated and heinous act intended for the sole purpose of cowing a people into submission—the Obama variant of GENOCIDE.

Progressives of today have become the apologists for fascism. Period. The litmus test of any humane, democratic standard, is the absolute rejection of Obama and his administration. Lesser-evil arguments are a means to accommodate ourselves to EVIL itself.

FEBRUARY 25, 2013

### **Drones, Africa and the Decline of American Power**

The announcement (Feb. 22) that the US has opened a drone base in Niger has been deliberately couched in abstract counterterrorism terms: unarmed Predator drones for reconnaissance purposes in order to track Al Qaeda and, never to be missed, "its affiliates." Who could possibly object to such worthwhile activity? The *New York Times*, in its news story, didn't seem to. And if polls are any indication, the general effort, especially in that far-off nebula called Africa, where the baddies, whom we've got on the run from Pakistan and Afghanistan, hang out, has Americans' rock-solid support.

We know the bit about "unarmed" and "reconnaissance" is not meant seriously, a Brennan-Obama wink as it were, because the same introductory ploy was used in Djibouti, where a very large US drone base was established on those terms, and quickly transformed to the only real purpose of such an enterprise, i.e., *targeted assassination*. Djibouti was carefully selected because of the wide swath of territory it covered, and because the government was amenable to US terms, including a status-of-forces agreement, just as now in Niger, in which US personnel are exempted from local jurisdiction in the commission of crimes. An ideal situation, in which we can roll up our sleeves and go after the Enemy, which in the Djibouti case meant al-Awlaki and his son, both US citizens.

What of course is not being said, about Niger, Djibouti, and the whole counterterrorism effort is that, as a result, Africa is "in play" more than previously for American imperialist activities, which before, could be taken for granted as normalized, almost routine, exploitation of raw-materials production, but *now*, with China's penetration, and far more sophisticated relationships to the peoples affected, such as building soccer fields and promoting education, requires of the US a catching-up phase to hold its own. As with imperialism, whether or not historically attached to colonialism, the so-called "natives" are a mere incidental factor in the execution of policy, yet in this case, not only they but also counterterrorism is incidental to US purposes. Even imperialism per se begins to blend into a wider framework, which, let's call, the geopolitical strategy for a) maintaining the security of capitalism in, and chief architect of, the world system, and b) buttressing America's claims to lead and work advantageously in that system.

We are in Africa whether or not al Qaeda and “its affiliates” are present, because Africa, in what has become an increasingly multipolar world, is both ripe for pickings in its own right *and* a pivotal sector in the political-economic rivalries of the Great Powers. Indeed, the fight is also becoming ideological. Just as we feared Russian penetration outside its immediate sphere of influence during the Cold War, now it is China, in a Second Cold War, or perhaps the First continued under new conditions, which we must at all costs prevent from invading *our* sphere of influence or testing our military strength. Bless al Qaeda, it enables us to prosecute our warlike activities against China! To paraphrase Sartre’s seminal essay on anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism is about everything except Jews; here, counterterrorism is about everything *but* terrorists; and if we didn’t have al Qaeda and “its affiliates” to contend with, we would have had to invent them, as part of our desperate attempt to remain the unilateral dominant power on the global stage.

The strain, however, is showing. The blanket use of assassination, coming directly from the personal authorization, down to specific targets, of His Majesty POTUS (and the Svengali-like Brennan always at his ear on the Terror Tuesday swing-dings off the Situation Room), is itself admission enough to the world that America, like Rome before it, is beginning its decline, placing it—except for its huge nuclear arsenal, which partly accounts for the deference still shown the US by the world community—as one among the many others in the family of nations, a position ordinarily satisfying to a country, but not to one which is accustomed to having its own way and, in addition, depends on the huge defense-cum-military budget to ward off economic stagnation and unemployment (even here, not succeeding all that well). This airstrip in Niger is more than the opening of a new front against terrorists. It is a straw in the wind, embodying the doctrine of permanent war, the necessity for creating an active regional presence throughout the globe, a forward line of bases to ensure the stabilization of areas intended for political-commercial penetration—and, if possible, gain the jump on China.

To falter in this regard is to risk falling victim to the psychological version of the domino theory: If the US loses in Africa (incidentally, Niger and Djibouti nicely complemented each other for controlling the East and West), this will encourage its (nonofficial) enemies from gaining ground in other areas of US interest. The unraveling of international power must be stopped. And behind China, what of Brazil, what of the Third World erupting and industrializing on its own terms? What of other regions, once drone warfare and assassination have deprived America of its moral coloring, would these countries still show deference to America? And in fighting this rearguard historical battle, the US can enter the realm of still greater urgency and its soulmate, *denial*, by fleeing from the major questions threatening world civilization itself, such as climate change and environmental degradation, taking refuge in the fairy land of antiscience, as though challenges to American might and challenges to the well-being of the planet will alike disappear, if we only close our eyes and *keep our finger on the firing trigger* (8,000 miles from target) for further assassinations.

*[Here follows my New York Times Comment (Feb. 23) to the article on Niger drone base. The objectives of imperialism]:*

Why assume the new base in Niger is directed against Al Qaeda, when in fact the drone presence, necessitating airstrips, provides the basis for establishing a US regional penetration that is part of exerting greater political and economic influence in Africa—head-to-head in competition with China, which has already gained access to raw materials and investment channels. Counter-terrorism is a ploy, a phony diversion, for achieving the classic objectives of imperialism. The status-of-forces agreement with poor

Niger indicates, not respect for another country, but the forcible wresting of concessions from them. Moreover, do you really believe the unarmed drones—if such be the case—will remain unarmed for long? The name of the game is to get inside, then proceed the way the US planned all the time. Assassination leaves a stain on US foreign policy which surely will come back to haunt America.

FEBRUARY 27, 2013

### **Politicization of Justice**

Tuesday, Feb. 26, the Supreme Court, Allito's majority opinion, took a significant step in linking counterterrorism to the ugly strain of anticommunism, McCarthyism, redbaiting, going back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Alien and Sedition laws, and defining much of the ideological landscape beginning with the suppression of the IWW, the Palmer Raids, Japanese internment in concentration camps, etc etc.

No, I do not exaggerate. The Court has become a rubber stamp for Obama's campaign of traducing the US Constitution, creating a climate supportive of heinous acts such as targeted assassination and Executive power-grabbing, as in the National Security State, use of the Espionage Act, and remodeling the CIA into a paramilitary force closely aligned with JSOC—across-the-board the clear violation of international law, all under the umbrella of glistening liberalism.

What is worse, targeted assassination or indefinite detention—there is no answer, both being the curse of totalitarianism while the people avert their gaze, too self-indulgent, selfish, wallowing in a condition of false consciousness, even to care. But this decision will go forth without a murmur, which is to wrap counterterrorism in the flag of legitimacy, and thus encourage more of the same: further deprivation of civil liberties, more drone attacks directed to terrorizing whole regions, providing the juices for keeping up US efforts at unilateral global political-economic dominance, and internally, intensified disparities between rich and poor. Poor Allito—a not very bright jurist whose credentials for the job are set down in his record: dependable reactionary, supporter of repression, a hackneyed individualism that sanctions the destruction of the welfare dimension of democratic argument. I say “poor” because obviously he is not alone, whether on the Court or in public life, and therefore should not be singled out for comment. Obama with his contempt for social justice and legal principles is his fitting companion.

When all three branches are arrayed against humane standards and practices of government, America is in deep s—. My *NYT* Comment follows. Hopefully, there will be a groundswell of repudiation of a public policy, having the imprimatur of the Constitution behind it, indeed, a force egging it on, which allows the government to kill, incarcerate, spy on, whomever it declares an enemy, with complete impunity and with immunity from prosecution.

*[My NYT Comment, Feb. 26. The abyss of illegality]:*

Let me be blunt. Obama supporters take note: he and DOJ were pleased at the Court decision preventing the test of government's extraordinary degradation of civil liberties. Allito's fiction that complainants do not have standing before the Court, applying, beyond wiretapping, to surveillance in general, rendition, and indefinite detention, turns counterterrorism into the New McCarthyism. We see here the politicization of the law.

Not surprising, however, given Obama's obsession with secrecy (the two go together) which envelops all of government. Why this vicious disregard of due process, habeas corpus, rule of law? Except that he, and Brennan, with the prostitution of justice by the Court, after decades of commitment to civil liberties, are fearful, correctly, of revealment of war crimes, particularly the program of armed drones for targeted assassination. Obama keeps digging a deeper hole into the abyss of illegality, and in practical terms, political murder. A one-way ticket to the International Criminal Court for Obama, Brennan, and Allito, would suit me fine.

MARCH 1, 2013

### **The Woodward Affair**

Today's *New York Times* (Mar. 1) carried the story of veteran *Post* reporter Bob Woodward's apparent fracas with the White House over his criticism that Obama changed the goal posts in the debate over the so-called budget crisis. The collective wisdom of media and *NYT* posters is that Woodward overreacted, and that the White House beat is always full of clashes. Score another free pass for the Obama camp! Republicans were quick to jump on the Woodward bandwagon, if only to score points against the administration. (Their own integrity, whether on freedom of the press or civil liberties in general, is hardly any better.)

The truth is, Obama by his actions has repudiated the principle of a free press, a free government, freedom in about every dimension (victims evaporated in drone strikes hardly were extended the basic juridical freedoms of due process and rule of law) one can think of—far more dangerous, because of cunning sophistication, than the Bush/Cheney cowboys whose pernicious actions were always and easily detectable. Woodward, here, has unfortunately papered over the event—the warning that the White House would be out to get him—rather than expose the stale, canned, vicious erection of WALLS against any and all criticisms of Obama. Given his disdain of and hostility toward critics, Obama reveals the kind of unstable personality that makes him dangerous, whether in domestic policy (Espionage Act prosecutions against whistleblowers, Bradley Manning being only the most visible case) or foreign policy (aggressive moves via the Asia “pivot” toward China, modernization of nuclear weaponry, or the morally reprehensible policy of targeted assassination).

News management is the tip of the iceberg, and itself is interconnected with the increase of Executive Power, the use of covert operations, the warmth shown the intelligence community, the employment of JSOC (often in partnership with the CIA), and even these become the tip of the iceberg for the Obama transformative moment—no, not a belief in democratic change, but instead, the very real militarization of the social framework, from political economy to social structure, for purposes unclear even to himself: more power, of course, but beyond that, systemic change consonant with such power.

Woodward will let the matter rest. We should not. The disguise must be torn away, revealing how liberalism in America shares precisely the same retrograde features as its purported enemies, not least, the blind admiration of wealth, the despisement of the poor, the fear of self-criticism as a nation, the belief that America can act with impunity in world affairs. Here follows my *New York Times* Comment (Mar. 1) on the Woodward news article.

*[NYT Comment, Mar. 1. Access trumps truthful reporting.]*

There is more to this than meets the eye. First, how claim press freedom when Obama has condemned transparency by his actions, is obsessed with **SECRECY**, and builds on the trend toward the National Security State? Your posters hide the facts in order to protect him. Woodward, I'm sure, can take care of himself. But the public has been condemned to ignorance on every meaningful issue, starting with armed drones for targeted assassination.

The White House has a rotten record under Obama in its forceful efforts at **NEWS MANAGEMENT**. I fear the press has buckled (including all media), lest they be denied access to their sources. Access has trumped candid, truthful reporting. One common example, when Cornel West called Obama "the black mascot of Wall Street," Valerie Jarrett was dispatched to chastise him.

I, for one, am disgusted with the Obama public relations **JUGGERNAUT**, the fear he has struck into what had previously been responsible journalism. Yes, Republicans want to make hay out of the Woodward business, but in this case they are right. Obama has one foot solidly planted in totalitarian territory. I'm waiting for the other foot also to cross the line.

MARCH 6, 2013

### **Obama's Partner in War Crimes**

When Senate Democrats such as Harry Reid praise Brennan to the heavens, as America's savior, and Diane Feinstein settles for OLC legal memos confined to the killing of Americans, but *not* the basis for the entire armed drone program for targeted assassination, it is fair to say Obama has the party as his accomplice in the violation of international law. If Democrats had the slightest moral conscience, they would a) censure Obama for assassination, this as a starter for a geopolitical strategy vastly enlarging the military's role in foreign policy; b) vote *against* Brennan's confirmation; and c) oppose everything Obama does, countering with specific proposals across the board, from steep progressive taxation to deep cuts in the military budget to stringent banking regulation and to ditto on climate change—again as a starter, given his gross betrayal of the bottom half of the American people.

Brennan's presence in government actually and symbolically drives a spike through the heart of US claims to being a democratic society. Not that democracy hasn't been tattered to shreds long before, but at least now the moonshine dispensed from the White House, because of its pretentiousness, makes still more evident the rapid slide away from basic freedoms. I wish Madame Tussaud's in London would re-create the Terror Tuesday's off the Situation Room—the ugliness of which would hardly be believed. Brennan in his element: hit lists, vaporizing the baddies, the triumph of just-war ideology. And now, at CIA, designed to his liking, a full-throttle engine of expansive paramilitary operations, so that through a take-no-prisoners approach it won't be necessary to have waterboarding—no one to waterboard. CIA operatives can now enjoy the fun of their JSOC partners, proving their manhood over what is left of the bodies of children, now blood spats.

And we have Obama to thank for providing cover for atrocities by his staunch defense of **SECRECY**, so that US global military expansion can proceed unhampered. Africa is ripe for pickings, but why stop there? Why stop anywhere, for that matter? This is the classic imperialism paradigm, adjusted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By “classic,” I mean, not simply expansion, markets, materials, the extraction of global wealth and resources into our vaults and coffers, but also, turning sadistic energies *inward* in shaping a docile underclass, an adoring middle class, and, at the upper reaches, a small, immensely wealthy ruling class. It can’t happen here? I think it has already, or is well along as a societal process, with Obama’s own distinctive contribution: monopoly capitalism on panzer treads.

Yes, Senate Intelligence has just confirmed 12-3 as I write. This is, of course, not unexpected. Everyone knows Brennan is the architect of the drone program, a program of state-sponsored murder that has killed more civilians by far, than those presumably validated as terrorists, and that has gone after first responders and those attending the funerals of the victims. How base and nihilistic can we get—and yet this is to be America’s point-man on the Obama-supported doctrine of *permanent war*. Drones have a special resonance with Obama, Brennan, and the national security team. High tech gadgetry is no doubt appealing, as is the total separation of order and execution, a sanitization of murder done from 8,000 miles away. But more, its locations, air strips, ground crews, accompanying personnel, all provide the means for implementing imperialism itself. Djibouti and Niger are windows into, if not the African soul, then at least its riches. Wherever drones are placed, the US has vantage ground-outpost-battle station rolled in one. One almost senses that for Obama, NATO is obsolete, although bearable as an “ally” in further interventions—but obsolete and even a possible restraining force when it comes to the big boy: confrontation with China.

The connection between drone warfare and the Pacific-first strategy still remains unclear, as though the former is intended to nibble away at the periphery, as well as challenge China’s influence in Africa. But ambitions for the drone as the prime agency for assassination remain high; its presence, given Obama’s already clear planning to institutionalize the whole practice, thus binding future administrations, has been reported by both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, such a proud legacy that, unfortunately, cannot also be found on banking regulation, progressive taxation, climate change, and a thousand and one other sell-outs. Here Brennan so perfectly epitomizes America, the way Eichmann did Germany, except that Brennan is more hands-on, and cannot plead deniability (although he has tried that in his first confirmation battle, his name subsequently withdrawn) as a bloodless administrator.

As with so much else, the American people sleep the sleep of innocence, purposefully unaware of war crimes abroad, serious deprivations—affecting many of them—at home. Blissful, a Norman Rockwell world of Dick and Jane. Jump, Fido, jump, citizen, roll over, play nice...as our political-economic-military elite smile down from above.

MARCH 8, 2013

### **Architect of Terror**

In the supposed controversy over Brennan’s confirmation as CIA Director, the elephant in the room that everyone has stepped around is the CIA itself. Massive evidence of torture (under the

impersonal designation, E.I.T.) should, were democracy truly applicable to the US, require the complete eradication of the CIA from the American structure and practice of government.

The reason for *covert* operations is that they cannot stand the light of day. Intelligence, cryptography, fine—but everything from politicizing neuroscience (the excellent recent article in *CP*) to armed drones for targeted assassination, with rendition, black holes, subsidies to domestic fascistic groups for breaking up rallies (my experience with *Breakthrough* at antiwar rallies in Detroit during Vietnam) in between, raises the cloak-and-dagger genre to a merciless level of trained, intensified sadism oblivious to the restraints of civilized behavior.

We honor political murder as the insurance policy for securing the Homeland, and its practioners, noble warriors on the front lines of justice. Brennan is a fitting Director. He will “correct” previous mistakes, i.e., make them less easy to detect. Secrecy is his and Obama’s plate of armor, impenetrable as befitting worship of the National Security State and its outsized hegemonic ambitions. In one sense, targeted assassination is at least out in the open, whereas destabilizing societies and governments held to be the enemies of America, Venezuela being a not-too-distant case in point, is more the CIA’s stock-in-trade. In Obama, the Agency, along with JSOC, has its impresario, cheerleader, and now tactical adviser, rolled in one.

The argument that it takes one to know one, here, that Brennan’s hardness and quarter-century service in CIA, will prove invaluable to bringing it to task, is akin to gallows humor infinitely compounded, given his own track record (not least his careful valuing of deniability when it comes to waterboarding and the whole gamut of inhuman viciousness). Whispering in the president’s ear on how best to turn up the violence toward America’s (mostly self-created) “enemies,” destines this Dynamic Duo, as it goes about institutionalizing the drone program, to the perpetuation of Fortress America, creating more enemies, more interventions, more surveillance at home, more paramilitary operations, all part of what I termed in an earlier article, *liberal fascism*, because dressed up in soothing phrases of peace, justice, and the virtues of the market.

As I see the situation, it appears that one cannot exist without the other, Obama, a novice in the commission of war crimes, dependent on Brennan for the ins-and-outs of their execution and expanding their scope, and Brennan, utterly without power, except *now*, as legitimated by POTUS, for translation into action.

Thus, Obama, a quick learner at the seats of power (plural, because one can no longer ignore factoring in the military to the political-economic ruling stratum), reaches well beyond his intelligence, training, and understanding to come up quite suddenly with the “pivot”-doctrine, a massive movement to the Far East, a Neo-Con, think-tank, Pentagon, rightwing sentiment in the air waiting to be articulated, and fully supported by supercarriers, defense alliances, joint maneuvers, troop movements, new weaponry in the pipeline, all for the purpose of challenging China in the reincarnation of the Cold War, in this case, a Pacific-first geopolitical vision and strategy directed to containing and isolating China, weakening its investment and trade in Africa and Latin America, and eliminating its obstruction to America’s unilateral quest for global dominance.]:

[*My NYT Comment, Mar. 7. Serial arsonist to quell 5-alarm fire.*]:

If, as I believe, the CIA is a cancer embedded in American government, would “reform” accomplish anything, or must it be torn out root and branch to conserve democracy? Brennan, as the

new Director (confirmation is clear, given both parties agree on precisely the need for E.I.T. and armed drones for targeted assassination), is like sending a serial arsonist to quell a five-alarm fire. Obama's decision to nominate him speaks volumes about his own similarly fascistic leanings and willingness to violate international law—Brennan and his vast expansion of Bush's campaign of assassination, and further expansion of secrecy, for that program, and presumably all matters under the head of national security.

Why such extreme secrecy? To hide war crimes. Period. Placing Brennan at CIA serves one purpose only, to magnify and attach greater significance to Obama's military doctrine: in addition to drones (and assassination) the greater emphasis on paramilitary operations, Obama + Brennan = the doctrine and practice of permanent war.

MARCH 11, 2013

### **Obama's Liberalized Hegemony**

Today's *New York Times* (Mar. 11), as usual, imparts scented news from its Administration sources, blissfully ignorant of how damaging the content, in this case, the use of the sequester presumably to trim down excess budgetary fat, but actually, to make the Leviathan more battle-ready, more able to spring forward in execution on multiple fronts, all for the purpose of flexing American muscle in the service of counterrevolutionary aims. One has to hand it to Obama; he has a finger in every pie, which is why the one-two combination of heavy armaments (think supercarriers, long-range bombers, nuclear-armed subs) and greater emphasis than earlier on the coordinating efforts of elite forces assigned to paramilitary operations. Still, pulling away the details, it seems to me the priority here is the all-but-military (thus far) confrontation with China—the so-called “pivot” to the Pacific of US military activity.

America requires a new, or rather, continued, Cold War, the same as an addict his drugs, or a banker his bonuses. It's as though hegemony (the modern version for exceptionalism, taking us a long way from John Winthrop) is inscribed in America's DNA, the ratifying condition for domestic political legitimacy subscribed to by both parties and heavy-handedly sold to the American public. We feast on it, identifying with dictators abroad the way we identify with billionaires at home...and *now*, increasingly militarily-connected evidences of exploit and carnage. Bradley Manning languishes in his cell while Obama, who put him there, prances on the world stage. To the former, his country has affronted moral decency and international law; to the latter, America can act with impunity in its own self-interest as being the highest morality there is. One also has to hand it to Obama, because he knows militarism and democratization are incompatible—you can't have both, which is *why* he has chosen militarism, any kind of diversion of funds, resources, ideas, values in support of social justice at home therefore representing national weakness and pitiable self-contempt.

Like Dr. Strangelove, he has plugged into the juices of reaction, possibly even barbarism, in part because he senses that this is the path to receiving the admiration of others, in part out of recognition that this is the means of placating ruling groups in America, and in part, because, although he has been portrayed as a compromiser, he actually believes mightily in the core of capitalist ideology, from imperialism and commercial penetration in foreign policy to market fundamentalism and the weakening of social dissent and countervailing powers at home. Whether



an act of Divine intervention, or simply being in the right place with the right set of advisers, Obama has got it right, a full recognition that foreign and domestic policies are *interrelated*, that it makes no sense to be and seek to remain the dominant military power in the world, and at the same time neglect the internal restructuring of domestic society. Wealth is a supreme good (concentrated, of course, in the hands of the wealthy, rather than as a mere abstract national attribute), necessarily complemented by extremes of income, status, and power, so that the poor indeed know their place *and* show gratitude for the crumbs thrown their way.

Social miscreants may call for, “Power to the People,” but true patriotism demands, instead, a meaner, leaner war machine, echoing the cry, and implementing its achievement, “Power to Our Saviors, who have kept us on the Right Path of Capitalism.” Amen.

*[My New York Times Comment (Mar. 11) on article discussing military budget cuts. A technologically-driven war machine]:*

*A “leaner” military—e.g., drones, cyberweapons, Spec Ops forces—is hardly a step toward either peace or demilitarization, but simply a way of maximizing LETHALITY at reduced costs. Obama is more militarily aggressive than his predecessors, of both parties, going back to the mid-20th century. This should, but does not, stick in the craw of the American public, a geopolitical strategy sheathed in liberal rhetoric that is counterrevolutionary in intent and wholly cynical and amoral in execution. To have the likes of John Brennan at his elbow is confirmatory of a qualitative leap in arrogance, the spirit of impunity, and a readiness to defy international law.*

*Obama incarnates treachery. The trinity of armed drones for targeted assassination, cyberwarfare, and, not merely Spec Ops, but a functioning integration of CIA and JSOC, casts the US into an unprecedented role, even by previous standards (such as Vietnam)—a role of unabashed insistence on unilateral global dominance, all comers, especially China, beware. This, in the context of negating social welfare at home, the Democrats’ own version of “starve the beast.”*

*The sequester is a hoax when it comes to military spending. Nothing is sacrificed, but rather, as with nuclear weapons, upgraded. Budget cuts, if any, equals merely a more technologically-driven war machine, and, as with drones, more impersonal, bloodless, the great psychological leap into deniability and seeming rationality.*

MARCH 13, 2013

### **Cyberwarfare Exceptionalism**

Tom Donilon’s recent speech to the Asia Society on Naughty China’s stealing of American intellectual property, a holier-than-thou continuing effort to discredit China in the eyes of the world (and through a constant drumbeat, keep the American public on its toes alert to, and predisposed for, the new Cold War—a *new* enemy in the wings—indispensable to domestic conformity, huge military budgets, and further interventions in the name of counterterrorism), simply exposes Obama and the US to global ridicule for pursuing our own program of cyberwarfare while condemning that of others. Even *then*, however, more is at issue.

The US is out to get China in any way it can, cyber-issues being a convenience for the more broad-gauged attack on China’s increasing political-economic challenge to America in such key

areas as trade, investment, raw-materials acquisition, and strategic prowess, now occurring in Africa and Latin America, a challenge tantamount to dismantling the US-arranged structure of world capitalism and itself the architect and leader.

How dare they? The wages of *hubris* are costly. The psychology of exceptionalism by which America has known itself for nearly four centuries, beginning in 1620 (a long period, as national mythologies go), is becoming instead the psychopathology of invincibility, in thematic content merely an incremental step forward, but translated into the aggressive surge of militarism of what is now a declining world power relative to China's rise and other centers of power coming on the scene, betokens a stridency akin to an attitude of desperation.

Hence the cavalier violation of international law by resorting to armed drones for targeted assassination. Hence the by now well articulated Pacific-first strategy, justifying still more hardware focused on naval power and long-range aircraft. Hence Obama's declared Iron Curtain around Government per se and its holistic retreat behind the walls of the National Security State. Hence the backward glance at and reinstitution of McCarthyism with respect to whomever rocks the boat, whistle-blowers to labor militants to critics of social policy. Exceptionalism: license to rule, at home and abroad.

Cyberwarfare exemplifies the Obama approach to American greatness. Strike from a distance (just as armed drones are directed by "pilots" often 8,000 miles away), both to elevate the role of technology in more sanitized destruction, and inflict maximum damage on a cost-effective basis. Our own preemptive use of cyber attacks is legitimated by their aim, to bring democracy to the world. Iran's use, vengeance pure and simple—not as retaliation for what we had done to them, but sheer Islamic malice toward US openness and freedom.

Ditto China, *or*, if stealing intellectual property actually occurs, welcome to the universe of capitalistic practice—they are proving apt learners. By that, I do not mean that one should excuse China for its own cyber-stealing, but there is a difference between that illegal behavior and the use of cyberweapons for purposes of sabotage—the difference between thievery and military-imposed acts of destruction. Perhaps if the US abandoned the latter, China might abandon the former.

In any event, the Obama administration has taken cyberwarfare to its heart, as part of the solid phalanx of advanced weaponry and accompanying strategy for what is euphemistically titled the "light footprint" in shaping world affairs to our liking.

*[My New York Times Comment (Mar. 12). The militarization of US policy]:*

With Natanz in full view, once again US hypocrisy comes to the fore, a double standard which characterizes the Obama administration at every turn. Billions for cyberwarfare, actually now operational, yet No, no to others, along with the fatuous distinction between attacks on intellectual property and that involving national security. Donilon-Brennan-Obama, Team A in the militarization of US policy-making affecting all realms of national life, but converging—with the "pivot"—on China, its isolation and containment, signals a more aggressive global posture than that of previous administrations going back decades. And with Susan Rice joining the Team, we have a full-court press to keep America in the forefront of hegemonic moves to ensure unilateral world military and commercial dominance. It ain't gonna work: this has become a multipolar global

power structure, in which the US can no longer act with impunity in satisfying its definition of national interest, no matter how many armed drones for targeted assassination it sends out.

We can't kill everybody who questions our system, our values, our conduct. If we could, the earth would be a global desert.

MARCH 22, 2013

### **Obama, Israel, and the Politics of Catharsis**

Obama's Middle East mission, given star treatment at every turn, demonstrates, like the famous Cairo speech in his first term, verbal subterfuge, a handy cover for insinuating US power in the region even more than sought by his predecessors. Oil is too simple a reason, though hardly negligible; rather, he appears to have a geopolitical strategy of global hegemony, political and ideological (from which the economic gains flow—instead of a more narrow-gauged imperialism), precisely to arrest America's downward curve of influence and power in the increasingly multipolar context of world power-centers. Israel is an outpost firming up US presence on one front. No one else is equally dependable, but not taking chances, we see military bases and airstrips for drone warfare focused on Africa and thus ensuring saturated regional coverage—no specific “enemy” identified, except terrorism in general. As I've said numerous times, *counterterrorism is the surrogate for counterrevolution*.

A less ambitious international posture might leave well enough alone, but the Middle East, though vital for its own sake, guards the gates of Asian expansion westward, and Russian southward. Simply, Obama has China in the US's cross-hairs, replacing Russia, in order to inaugurate a New Cold War, useful in the same respects as the Old, from stifling domestic criticism and protest to assisting banking and major corporations to achieve mega-growth proportions, rendering them supposedly untouchable. The mind-set here is the domino theory: Do not budge an inch on what seems the threefold goal of policymaking—privatization, financialization, militarization, all directed to the nature of American capitalism—else the entire edifice of the US political economy, and with it, its world power, would collapse. Israel is merely one instance, a support of broadly conceived counterrevolution, with respect to its surroundings, and as the *facilitator* of US penetration, from securing oil to natural resources, throughout the hemisphere and encroaching still further East.

Meanwhile, America presses steadily West, the Obama-“pivot” being a masterstroke of sorts, intended to engage China directly, with the massive movement of forces, symbolically, the supercarriers, but also the bread-and-butter sinews of war: nuclear, non-nuclear, paramilitary, long-range bombers, all lined up to intimidate China, and behind China, the Far Pacific, including Japan and South Asia. Where and how Obama came to this point, one that finds succor in market fundamentalism, Espionage Act-prosecutions, surveillance, all suggesting the domestic society placed on the same footing of militarism as in foreign policy, we'll perhaps never know—or know only when it is too late. But as we proceed, we should not be taken in by his speech today in Jerusalem (Mar. 21), as though he genuinely favors peace in that region or even would entertain the democratization implied by coequal standing of Israelis and Palestinians in a single unified nation based on the equal rights of all.

We see in this visit, all the stops pulled out, a politics of *catharsis*: say the right things, blow away the repression practiced on the Other, and then go back to turning the same screws. Obama's performance in Israel mirrors his domestic performance: promises meant to be broken, talk of peace while engaging in war, and when the accumulated deceit is about to burst open, provide the purgative with more words of unctious platitudes. Obama-Brennan and Obama-Netanyahu (what I refer to below as compatible bedfellows) represent the face of liberal fascism, Obama the smiling face of betrayal, his partners here, the real thing of political thuggery and merciless killing.

*[My New York Times Comment (Mar. 22) likely not published, given this paper's penchant for censoring radical opinion]:*

Obama's putatively ennobling rhetoric (i.e., Ben Rhodes's rather glib speechwriting) is not persuasive because Israel under no circumstances wants peace—and, by not taking a stand on the settlements, Obama merely reinforces that position. He loves the adulation (and support which will now come from home), but this trip is a clear example of public relations trumping substance. Perhaps we can see two further interventions (Iran, Syria), if indeed US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is finally winding down. Hints of that were dropped in his various conversations.

I am sick of being lied to, whether domestic or foreign policy. In this case, Obama overlooks the harshness of Israel's occupation. The wall going up on the border between Israel and Egypt, as with the other walls (Gaza, Golan, etc.) speaks volumes about a hunkering down—Fortress Israel—rather than moving toward peace. And Obama legitimizes the charade.

But why expect otherwise? US armed drones for targeted assassination, Obama's signature weapon, testifies to violation of international law with impunity, much as Israel too does—making for compatible bedfellows. In world opinion, the US and Israel are engaged in a race to the moral bottom via the militarization of the two societies. From Irgun to Likud to the present, a straightline projection of the will to dominate the Palestinians by whatever means, not unlike US foreign policy with its Obama emphasis on covert and paramilitary operations (CIA/JSOC).

MARCH 25, 2013

### **Solitary Confinement and the Totalitarian Abyss**

Chalk up another victory to the dark forces of the hegemonic demiurge, the unrestrained, irresistible thrust of monopoly capitalism in the throes—we are speaking here of the US, because, as a world system, capitalism is still capable of thrusting up new centers of global power—of its senescence. As America starts downward, sunk in the morass of the privatization and financialization of its political economy, it instinctively turns to the militarization of culture, manners, understanding, with the result of barbarism in confronting the devils of its own creation. Anyone who is vulnerable will do. Today's report of placing immigrants in solitary confinement on the slightest pretext is hardly surprising—except surprising that the news even gets out.

The USG is in lock-down mode, secrecy valued highly in its own right, to hide the violations of national and international law. Public policy and the commission of war crimes, specifically the amoral use of overwhelming force in Iraq, without, on this tenth anniversary, the slightest remorse in official circles, as a window into policy-making contemptuous of world opinion, and seeking

further fields of conquest in the financial, commercial, and ideological realms, always backed by the threat or actual employment of military power. What the US does abroad, it increasingly feels safe to do—and in measured steps now *does*—at home. Even on such a straightforward matter as assassination of Americans on American soil, there is vacillation at DOJ and the scrambling for more legal memos justifying just about anything under the heading of National Security, memos nonetheless, of course, kept secret.

Nothing appears to phase the American public, here, solitary confinement as practically automatic in response to perceived disobedience, as though dogs not fully housebroken. Willie Sutton taught us bank robbers go where the money is: perhaps Authority, from homeland security officials to prison guards (and why not, up to the top, POTUS), goes where sadism is honored, and self-satisfaction in tyrannizing over others guaranteed. What a feeling of power, stripping the individual of his/her rights, identity and self-respect! Yet immigrants are only one example of the larger attempted destruction of the person, sanctioned by the doctrine of indefinite detention, implemented by the denial of habeas corpus, and further extended, as the logical end-state, of targeted assassination, indefinite detention carried to infinity.

We seem, as a nation, to be on a collective death-kick, bodily inflicted on others, spiritually on ourselves. I include now my Comment to the *New York Times* (Mar. 24), not because I want to take issue with this newspaper, but because it is the source of the reporting, and because the facts provided enable one to formulate a statement on current abuses. Merely critiquing The Times is unworthy of *CP* space, whose writers have better things to do. But the touchstone for one's analysis, deriving from the investigative reporting, seems to me a different matter, furnishing the basis for a one-two punch, non-repetitive in content, which carries the discussion further. If readers feel the *NYT* Comment is inappropriate or mere padding, I find the format indispensable to clarifying my ideas and recommend disregarding the citation and viewing what follows as simply an Addendum:

Rule of law? Respect for human dignity? America is fast sliding into the abyss of totalitarian ways. From solitary confinement, as here, to indefinite detention, to targeted assassination, to—however controversial to say this—the role of John O. Brennan in the councils of government, the nation forfeits all claims to speaking out for human rights in the world. We see extreme punishment, in these case studies, for minor infractions—or simply, for individuals asserting religious beliefs or wanting to preserve their autonomy. The sadism exhibited by Authority reminds one of the southern chain-gangs laboring in the hot sun—or the gulags of the frozen North.

What has become of America? Why the hate? Why the fears? Why the psychopathological embrace of guns on the individual level, interventions on the international level? We despise the poor among us; in reality, we despise ourselves and, mounting ever stronger defense mechanisms, displace these feelings onto others. or The Other, whomever the designated enemy du jour is.

America has become pathetic—a Leviathan clothed in fool's gold, its military budget standing in inverse relation to its social safety net. The ramparts of freedom have been breached by *both* major parties, a bipartisan consensus enjoying popular support for last-ditch efforts at unilateral hegemonic influence and control in the world system, as the world itself slowly and surely is becoming decentralized—hence the stridency for remaining on top.

MARCH 26, 2013

## Gay Marriage: a Contrarian's View

Radicalism comes in many varieties. A certain orthodoxy, however, breeds intolerance when one appears to stray beyond approved boundaries, or, when one, as in introducing my St. Bernard puppy to a Marxist study group in Cambridge years ago as “Karl Marx,” to be greeted by sullenness and hostility, appears to crash against ideological iconicity. I’m sure *CP* readers and contributors will find my views on gay marriage objectionable, if not traitorous. Good. A little shaking-up of the Temple never hurt anyone.

I claim to speak as a radical, by persuasion and experience, as, of course, is anyone’s privilege, there being no board of certification to pass on credentials. First then, gay marriage is obviously a progression toward greater societal democratization, and *intrinsically* is meritorious both for individuals at interest and society as a whole. Whether it satisfies the Constitution’s equal-protection clause or others, is not my concern (given the way the Constitution historically has been the plaything for legitimating things alike fair and foul). Let’s say, it stands on solid juridical ground and, without objection on my part, is ruled applicable in all 50 states. *But*, that does not alter my fundamental belief: the issue deserves less attention than that affecting the wrongful conduct of USG in both domestic and foreign policy.

Unless and until the American people resist and defy the degradation of human beings where it really hurts, in the heart, in the mind, the stomach, the spirit, through the mixture of militaristic striving for hegemonic global influence and power, the destructive hatred of social-welfare-oriented domestic public policy and government, the capitulation to wealth and the arrogance of power, further abuses and treacheries as long as my arm, why should one take seriously this demand, as though the issue could be surgically removed from the broad configuration of fascistic beliefs, programs, the conduct of government itself which must be opposed?

March for gay marriage? Sure, when the enormity of evil is appreciated and opposed, but, for me, not before, because in the present world it is a *luxury*, hardly to be equated with the daily privations of the underclass of slum dwellers spread broadcast, much of it, from Gaza to Latin America, through our doing, and to the silent masses even civil unions and the transmission of property (WHAT property?) is beyond their reach. You get the point. Succinctly, *class trumps sexual politics; class trumps gender identity*. Why? Because without the democratization of the social order, personal happiness will prove one way or another exploitative, in the realm of marriage itself and structured through all social relations and institutional arrangements. Gay marriage in the 50 states, ongoing interventions and assassinations—no thanks; let’s get our heads screwed on right (or rather, Left).

My *New York Times* Comment (Mar. 26), on the editorial calling for a Supreme Court decision which sanctions gay marriage in all 50 states, follows:

In theory I agree with The Times editorial: equality is a Constitutional desideratum when- and wherever it can be applied. But let’s put the issue of gay marriage into context, i.e., prioritizing national goals. At this time, the issue is a diversion and trivialization, in the face of large-scale poverty, the vast gulf in wealth-and-power differentials, militarism run amuck, the nation in steep decline with respect to its social safety net, etc. Frankly, compared with the civil rights struggle, which NYT raises as analogous, and in which in the 1950s-60s I was active, I find proponents and

affected parties of gay marriage self-indulgent and flaunting their preferences as though that form of discrimination raises to the plane of deprivation experienced by others in America's long history of oppression and repression.

Before this fight (if it be that), let's see collective opinion and action against POVERTY, WAR, drone-created assassination, intervention, regressive taxation, pollution, inadequate health care, the bipartisan servicing of major wealth, etc. Only then would I have respect for gay-marriage decisions and advocates. Otherwise, sexual identity per se, as an issue, seems, in light of gut-wrenching suffering throughout the world, less important than addressing systemic brutalization of the human being. I obviously speak as a radical, and expect concurrence from no one.

MARCH 27, 2013

### **Where Democracy Ends, Fascism Begins**

In today's *Washington Post* (Mar. 27) Greg Miller and Julie Tate report on John Brennan's facing "a quandary over clandestine service appointment," the term "quandary," in this case, ordinarily signifying perplexity or doubt, is really not quite accurate, because a) he knows who and what he wants already, b) he is engaged in damage control, knowingly advancing a candidate directly associated with torture, which might give The Agency (shades of Kafka) a bad name and antagonize Senate Intelligence, and c) he least of all wants to bring the clandestine service into public view, the secretive division within the secretive agency presiding over, among other questionable activities (i.e., violations of international *and* national law) the secretive armed drone program for targeted assassination.

Not unusual for the Obama administration: Three layers of secretiveness, and that just for starters in this one realm. One would almost think here of children's games, except that we are speaking of the core of lethality in the conduct of American foreign policy. Again, not surprising, the candidate is nameless, faceless, the record out of reach, just like the video records of torture she helped to destroy (without authorization from above, obviously, because CIA higher-ups will do everything to ensure deniability, especially where war crimes are concerned); all we know is that she is a woman, and that senior officials have used the prospective appointment—she is presently temporary director of NCS—as evidence of diversity, a "two-fer" for CIA, both a woman and very much respected for her activities in torture, thus, as the new Agency Director, a feather in Brennan's cap.

Obama chose wisely. Halfway through the First Term, we learned that Brennan had become his closest adviser, not only on national security, but with that central, how this feeds into the wider geopolitical strategy of USG. One could not ask for a more competent adviser, given Obama's attunement to the doctrine and practice of *permanent war*, most clearly foreshadowed by and then embodied in the drone program of assassination.

The post-World War II legacy of Marshall Plan-style foreign aid to strengthen Rightist leaders and governments (as well as penetrate the internal economies of the recipient nations) has now given way to the terrorization of peoples, pure and simple. As we learn more about the armed drones, despite the tight secrecy of their operations (location of airstrips, weaponry, delivery systems, number of missions, number of civilian casualties), the reputed counterterrorism purpose gives way to the larger design, counterrevolution on the international level, but, more to the point

here, the effect on the individual of a deliberate mounting of sheer panic, not unlike Nazi UAV raids over London, to soften the path for resurgent US political-economic-ideological influence, and therefore part of the nuts-and-bolts of counterrevolution itself.

Obama-Brennan-CIA, a lovely troika qua hegemonic battering ram, reached a structural convergence, aka The National Security State, just in the nick of time, as America has begun an accelerated decline from *numero uno* in global power and now perhaps vainly seeks to reassert its unilateralism in world politics at the very moment alternative modes of organization—the rise of multipolar centers of power—some quite possibly even socialist, are on the historical boards. For our troika, anything goes! Assassination, torture, covert operations, the wider use of paramilitary forces, cyberwarfare, massive “defense” spending (what a misnomer), modernization of nuclear weaponry, naval power, from itty-bitty littoral craft to supercarriers,...god, the list is inspiring, as thrilling to recite, as is the experience of watching Stealth flyovers at the halftime of big football games. I already have a lump in my throat. And we owe this resurgence of American power to Barack Obama, his man at CIA, and, not to be forgotten, the CIA’s partner in spreading democracy, JSOC, itself running the military wing (remember, the CIA is, yes, civilian) of the drone assassination program, or in today’s terms, the more neutral-sounding “project.”

Our Lady-in-Waiting, at National Clandestine, will probably get the permanent appointment, and Brennan also will probably keep the Senate Report on the Agency, with Sen. Feinstein’s cooperation, secret. *Plus ca change, plus c’est la meme chose*. Except that it’s not the same thing. At first, a year in, I thought of Obama as Bush II, but, still in the first term, I realized that he has introduced a qualitative change, a more tightly integrated (i.e., systemic) militarized capitalism, not simply, capitalism at a higher or more mature stage, conventionally thought of as the monopolistic consolidation of industry and banking, but *that* along with an authoritarian formation enshrouded in secrecy, all accountability out the window. Therefore the human troika has as its counterpart a structural troika: financialization, militarization, privatization. No wonder a National Clandestine Service, the next step: joint CIA-JSOC activity *within* the United States. Drones overhead, not Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, but California, New York, Illinois.

APRIL 8, 2013

### **America’s Death Wish**

Again we hear (NYT ed., 4/6) about “the damage wrought by the gun lobby,” as though a cabal of manufacturers and other interested parties was responsible for the diseased mentality centered on gun violence in America. What a convenient scapegoat, when in reality structural-cultural behavioral malfunction taking ideological and political form, increasingly seen in daily life, speaks instead to the institutional *core* of society. America exemplifies a social system of puristic capitalism.

Whatever occurs in that matrix, from top to bottom, from targeted assassination to streetcorner hold-ups, from the activities of POTUS to that of the gang member, must be related back to the originaive framework, one characterized by militarism, the commission of war crimes, abrogation of the rule of law, policy-designs promotive of unemployment, deregulation, trickle-down wealth distribution accentuating and making worse class differentials of income and power, and *inequality*



as the first principle of life. In sum, human worth has no intrinsic value or meaning. This profound alienation is not caused by, but is the precedent condition for, gun violence.

How view Newtown, when drones kill more children in a year via collateral damage than a half-century of senseless mayhem? A deranged killer, or America's top leadership huddled together on Terror Tuesdays, flipping baseball cards to determine who next is vaporized, just steps off the Situation Room? To exonerate a dying culture and the death it creates and sucks down with it, is simplistic when before our eyes we see human indifference at every turn, and cover-ups to hide our mechanisms of repression and exploitation, a condition of self-pacification which makes life tolerable and the blood-letting normal. Violence, of course, has been central to the American experience, over 400 years in the making. This has been not only individual violence, always present when the political culture sanctions what some can do to others with impunity, but also structural-economic violence, as in the enforcement of slavery and the immiserization of the working class, in both cases reflecting stages of capitalist development in which the organization of the labor force receives prime consideration.

But with the disciplining of labor inevitably comes the legitimization of force per se, part of the inventory of the peacetime army and also franchised out to Pinkertons, strikebreakers, and goon squads of every description. Suppression was America's middle name when it came to maintaining the status quo, more recently giving way to subtler means of gaining class advantage (as in stimulating false consciousness), but with the same unmistakable authorization of force should there be the need.

Does this take us to the roots of gun violence? Probably not. Antecedently, we must look to how the human personality has been shaped by the specific features of the institutional system—and oddly enough, the starting place for both is the same: the political economy which thrives on the *insensate* individual, rejects moral standards not generated by or conducive to the property right (the materialization of ethics), and finds war the ideal state for advancing hegemonic interests (as well as disposing of surplus production). This may seem a stretch in accounting for garden-variety crime, but consider, how would crime, gun violence in particular, be sustained in the absence of invidious distinctions? In juridical principles and practices devoted to the equalitarian administration of justice? In gross domestic product directed to the well-being of society, not simply its militarization?

The odds are stacked against gun control, let alone gun disappearance. Cosmetic surgery may follow the recent flurry of interest. Even then, the pathology of force, intuitively sensing nothing has been done, will create a still deeper penetration of the American psyche. Here follows my *New York Times* Comment (Apr. 6) on the gun lobby, an editorial—to its credit—that encounters the problem at least half-way:

The gun lobby would be powerless if the society were genuinely democratic. As it is, America reveals its inmost nature (gun violence providing irrefutable proof): a culture of unrestrained individualism, underpinned by a doctrine of unlimited wealth accumulation, by any means possible. Humans become transvalued as objects, better yet, obstacles, to be run over when they stand in the way of one's goals, themselves narrowly materialistic. How expect otherwise, given policies at the top favoring assassination, massive defense spending, confrontation with China, paramilitary operations on a global basis?

Desensitization to death, contempt for rule of law, the doctrine of permanent war, all testify to the enshrinement of violence. Demonizing advocates for “gun rights” merely passes the buck. WE are the problem, not the crazies in our midst, and until we take stock of American militarism, poisoning the wellsprings of society’s basic values, there shall be countless more Newtowns in our future, marching stride for stride with interventions, joint exercises, weapons’ development, an atmosphere of shock and awe.

If Obama wishes to make an impact on gun control, let him first forswear the use of armed drones for targeted assassination, campaigns for regime change, and, at home, the slow deaths of our people facing unemployment, foreclosure, and other social diseases brought on directly through deregulation of the economy and the wider militarization of American life.

APRIL 12, 2013

### **Budgetary Fascism**

NYT solemnly exonerates Obama on its editorial page (Apr. 11) for going beyond the call of duty and, in a display of selfless patriotism, calls for cuts in the social safety net, affecting merely the poor and working people, as he nobly strives to break the budgetary impasse and gain the approval, or at least cooperation, of Republicans.

With a president like that, America, notwithstanding the patriotic garbage being written, is on the *fast track* to liberal fascism, i.e., the corporate-military synthesis, embedded in an hierarchical social system, but with bread and circuses rather than the concentration camp (at least for now).

We kiss the feet of the Assassination President, rather than look our society squarely in the eye. For if we did, we would recognize how much war, intervention, militarism, torture, Espionage Act prosecutions, the whole bloody show that passes in the name of democracy, has disembowled our most basic values (themselves long fallen into the categories of political mythology and ideology). Have we as a nation passed the point of no return? There is little reason to think—or hope (a word which sours in the mouth, given its Obama-politicized usage)—otherwise.

Yet we must struggle, if for no other reason than to make the political-economic leadership sweat, as they tighten the screws—or *think they have*. Capitalism has so botched its (and our) future that payback is sure to follow. America has centered in itself all the forces of world reaction; wherever a dictator on the globe appears, we are sure to find and assist him.

Wherever financial giantism exists, we are sure to find means of integration into the system. But now militarism stands head and shoulders above all the traits defining America’s counterrevolutionary posture.

Liberals-conservatives, a devil’s stew of corrupt politics, chooses as its representative to the outside world a unified command embracing paramilitary and covert operations up to and then including (after we factor in supercarriers and Stealth aircraft) the highest level of human carnage, nuclear weapons: an unrestrained force capable of halting temporarily the historical process of self-determination, anticolonialism, autonomous modernization, until either the monolithic haves beat each other down, or the have-nots experience a collective awakening to the same end of supplanting societal elites.

Meanwhile, the US has Obama, dependable to the nth power in serving America's ruling groups. Joy to the world.... Years of civil rights demonstrations down the tubes (a greater setback to genuine racial democratization in America than centuries of segregation and discrimination, because hidden under the mask of presumptive advancement is delivery into the jaws of nympholeptic wealth). I can almost see my Paul Robeson 78s melting in shame. So, budget, budget—a class process, with the weight all to one side; and a *revealing* process, not only of where power resides in America, but also of the content of its social values, authoritarian in its complicity with warmaking abroad, and inequality of wealth and power at home.

My *New York Times* Comment (Apr. 11) follows:

NYT accepts the rightward shift in the political-ideological structure as a given, hence rewarding Obama for shrewdness via putting Republicans on the spot. This mad race to the bottom, symptomatic of bipartisan moral bankruptcy, has no end in sight. Obama proves his mettle by cuts to the social safety net? Nonsense, he proves only his and his party's political treachery. Democrats stand for very little—Republican lite—as meanwhile military so-called exigencies suck out the lifeblood of the Republic.

I'd rather cut out completely the drone program for targeted assassination, than see privation, mortgage foreclosures, malnutrition define the parameters of American life. And what do we have to look forward to in 2016—a Clinton-Biden fight for the nomination? I'm glad I'm old enough to have seen something of the New Deal, public works, and FDR's strengthening of the American spirit when all was darkness.

APRIL 15, 2013

### **Testing Hegemony**

*Realpolitik*, its claims to the contrary, has usually been a fraud, dealing neither with practical politics, in contradistinction to an ideological posture, worldview, or *weltanschauung*, nor with a pragmatic grasp of reality, in contradistinction to a theoretical comprehensive conception, here, of political economy, social structure, fundamental values, whether to be or having already been achieved through political power. Seemingly visionary, its vocabulary is all about the status quo, authored by and at the service of established institutions. One thinks immediately of Machiavelli, Metternich, and, among lesser lights, Henry Kissinger, generally in praise of conservative policies skillfully packaged to appear reasonable and enlist the support of the masses. In doing so, we generally fail to connect the dots: a manipulative mode of organizing power-relations through war, plunder, domestic repression, and super patriotism.

As such, even when we penetrate the propagandistic façade, we seldom find it turned, as an analytical tool, to the advantage of radicals. For radicals, it is unknown or unacceptable territory. I should like to change this, appropriating *realpolitik* to the unenviable task of justifying (less as defense than explanation, the reader alone rendering final judgment) the current policies and activities, specifically with respect to nuclear warfare, of North Korea, something no self-respecting radical conceives of doing in the present political-intellectual climate. (Not that radicals *must* support North Korea or minimize its institutional-cultural mechanisms of conformity and repression, assuming these can be demonstrated, but only that radicals should not fear making a

positive assessment if that appears warranted, nor be intimidated by “official” thinking and consequent public ridicule when adopting an unpopular position with respect to the DPRK.)

Granted, nuclear warfare is *per se* evil; there are no attenuating circumstances for what North Korea has proposed over the last several weeks—none whatever, except the moment one realizes the magnitude of the opposition it faces to its survival, one can then begin to explore the wider context for its posture, and, still without granting absolution (as if that were in our power!), recognize the provocation counts both ways, with the US far more violative of international law and common decency of the two. Short of the nihilistic lesser-of-two-evils argument Democrats foisted on the American people to justify Obama’s reelection and current policies, what can be said about the North Korean position which constitutes an indictment of America’s present course in world politics? A vast sea of goose-stepping, automaton-like soldiers pumping clenched fists, as seen on television, is hardly reassuring. Why then proceed further?

First, radicalism must look in the mirror. In the last four decades, it has become increasingly fearful its patriotism broadly construed will be questioned, with the result that the political-ideological spectrum has gravitated perhaps farther rightward than in living memory. It does not require proclamations or deeds affecting the overthrow of capitalism to represent unacceptable radicalism. A thousand and one sundry charges not sufficiently mainstream will do. The result, as a gradual process of ideological and structural absorption, is the internalization of boundaries, nowhere more focused than on radicalism.

If the historical burden has been on the labor movement as the catalyst for change during the second-quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the antiwar and civil-rights movements in the third, society since then has been cast adrift, left at the mercy of the growing consolidation of wealth, chiefly in finance, and the steady accumulation of power in the military, together synthesized in a mature stage of capitalism which seeks domination of the process of globalization. When I say, “patriotism broadly construed,” I mean radicalism’s drawing inward, seeking safe havens, a “go-it-along” attitude toward foreign policy, war, intervention, the domestic *imbalance* of wealth and power, a time for proving itself supplicants at the altar of market fundamentalism, privatization—in a word, radicalism as neutralization of the person. When this happens, prudishness takes over, here, follow the path of least resistance—or none at all.

This is understandable—up to a point. Radicals transvalue compromise as principle, a necessary mental gymnastic which enables *us* to differentiate ourselves from the pack, and without which the pretense to possessing for our ideas and actions an immaculate nature, freed alike from cynicism and expedience, is not possible. Else, the line is crossed, as it has been for many, and we uncritically reproduce what exists with Obama, the liberalization of moral turpitude, the smiling face of permanent war, sustained through bipartisan collaboration. The popular phrase, “thinking outside the box,” which should not be taken too seriously (if it were, we’d see more equality, less inhumaneness), creates anxiety for radicals, still fearful of the political culture of red-baiting and, since the untimely demise of antiwar and civil-rights protests, betrays a submission to authority and false consciousness devoid of social content. I would like to break the mold in a modest way and reach beyond current radical discourse to contend, free from illusion, that North Korea, rather than we look away as it is relentlessly demonized, deserves serious attention as the wrongfully treated party in international politics, led by the United States in its heavy-handed work of regime change.

Here hats-off to *CounterPunch* this week for bucking the tide of obligatory patriotism, felt even among radicals, when it published three articles that neither attacked the DPRK nor added to the antiradical, one-sided treatment of its position. Stansfield Smith's "What North Koreans Think," Apr. 8, based on first-hand interviews, captures the distinction between "slave" and "noble" states, the latter poignantly expressed—because largely still denied—as those which "are in control of their own development and have a future." One sees from respondents informed criticism of US policies and the double standard applied to North Korea in terms of the sanctions regime, alleged violations of international law, and the provocative activities intended to force it into lose-lose military confrontations. (One almost imagines eavesdropping on Obama's national-security deliberations, so closely have they detected his obsession with destroying North Korea.)

In the second, Gregory Elich's, "What's Annoying the North Koreans?" Apr. 9, we find a clear pattern in which America has equipped, trained, and mobilized South Korean troops to *vanquish* North Korea by whatever means—a strong statement, by my reading, but borne out by the evidence. Elich's detailed account only goes back to October 2012, yet in that brief span one sees the cumulative effect of six decades of intervention, direct and by proxy, now accelerated. No doubt is left about US intentionality, a carefully constructed program, bipartisan, focused on bringing the DPRK to its knees. Through US pressure, South Korea is granted exemption from limits placed on the range of its ballistic missiles; US-South Korea military exercises lead to the doctrine and practice of "tailored deterrence," which called for the use of disproportionate force (and preemptive strikes); satellite launches are viewed instead as ballistic missile tests, thus rationalizing the South's deployment of cruise missiles aimed at the North; and, to name another grievance, sanctions on trade and banking (aimed at North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank) practically halted international monetary transactions. And of course there were overlapping joint exercises last month—Key Resolve and Foal Eagle—accompanied by a large anti-missile build-up, displays of stealth bombers, and intimidation on a grand scale.

Stansfield Smith, in "North Korea's Justifiable Anger" Apr. 10, picks up on the grossness of the US role of intervention ("...these are not 'deterrent' war maneuvers, but 'pre-emptive war' maneuvers"), and the reminder of air war casualties during the Korean War, implicitly querying: how would we like, given the Stealth bombers flying in the vicinity, putting ourselves in the North Koreans' shoes? One quotation from the article says it all: "An accurate reading of the events leading up to the present situation shows that North Korea is responding to US military *escalation*, and in particular to US refusal to negotiate. This includes a peace treaty to end the Korean War, any steps towards reunifying Korea, the end to the occupation of South Korea and ending the *annual* month-long US-South Korean war maneuvers. Even today, it includes US refusal to talk in order to lower the tensions." (Italics, mine)

*Context* is or should be everything in public—especially foreign—policy, in this case open hostility and the direct threat to the North's survival via a US-South Korea offensive paradigm of containment, first, then ultimate extinction, as part of a broader geopolitical strategy in the Far East creating open markets consonant with the structure of advanced capitalism. Neither socialist and/or communist remnants nor national liberation and/or autonomous modernization models is wanted. South Korea is America writ small, free-market capitalism with, nonetheless, the inevitable consolidation and monopolization which makes a mockery of free markets, except in their common everyday meaning: deregulation carried to the hilt. *Context*: The US has used North Korea as an

ideological punching bag since time immemorial, or rather, the last six-plus decades. The reasons may be numerous, from planting a heavy footprint in the region as part of the political-strategic framework for keeping the Soviet Union (now Russia), Japan, India, and to the point of deemphasizing the others, China, within an acceptable, stabilized international framework under US leadership, to its fine tuning under Obama of the “pivot” to Asia, specifically, the isolation and containment of China as the key to maintaining singular world-power status by any and all means. Obama’s mellifluous phrase, “all *options* on the table,” comes to mind.

In this light, North Korea provides the pretext for keeping alive Cold War tensions (with the switch to a new adversary), thereby enabling America to continue waving the banner of world counterrevolution, whose ripples spread from Asia to Africa, the Middle East, and, perhaps more urgent than ever, Latin America. This in turn provides a credible basis and rationale for mammoth defense expenditures, with the clear advantage, consistent with militarism and the maldistribution of wealth, of cutting to the bone the domestic social safety net, an ideal way of maintaining class differentials and the disciplining of the labor force. The interconnectedness between militarism, privatization, capital accumulation, *and* the social control of the working class (including a surplus labor force, in the form of an underclass), is made patently clear in the past half-century, brought to a flowering in Obama’s revitalization of the Cold War under the auspices of counterterrorism. Here it is hard to determine whether foreign or domestic policy considerations are paramount, although fortunately for policy makers they go beautifully together. In either case, North Korea becomes the malign poster-boy of choice (presumably, raw communism as the incitement to comprehensive action at home and abroad), and in its own right is simultaneously viewed as essential to our aims, cast as the villain, enabling us to implement, in concert with the South, both the market paradigm and the necessary military presence for keeping pressure on China, and yet on the more basic level, regarded as *irrelevant*, merely the sentry at the gates, standing before China. In true US fashion, to obtain maximum ideological mileage it is necessary to demonize whomever we designate as the enemy.

Absent US world power ambitions and arrangements (e.g., next door, South Korea, part of the diamond necklace of military bases spanning the globe), would North Korea feel compelled to maintain a military state-of-readiness? We have no answer, except that the US has never tried to dispel fears of conquest—just the opposite: rearming South Korea and Japan, participating in joint military exercises, launching economic boycotts which knowingly target foods and medicine. This past week we were treated in the media to the flight of nuclear-capable Stealth bombers, as a blatant warning to North Korea to knuckle under or face the prospect of nuclear annihilation if it persists in its weapons’ production. And then (Apr. 4), we find acceleration of the timetable for installing the missile defense system in Guam. Each day, there is something else or something new. The US cares not a farthing for North Korea; it uses it as a surrogate for striking out at China.

My defense of North Korea’s present course—here radicals might want to jump ship, lest their political legitimization be questioned—turns on invoking *Realpolitik* as a standard of measure. Apologetics are not wanted or needed. Take a worst-case scenario: North Korea’s threat of nuclear warfare, a point which must hold for all countries, the US and Israel included, is *per se* evil. North Korea is not pure Utopia, pie-in-the-sky soulful bliss (nor, for that matter, blanket dystopian Hades either). No quarter, then, should be given to the nuclear cloud, which is to be condemned. Nor can one claim that provocation is a two-way street, however heavy the traffic of trucks and artillery on

one side, as though therefore excusing human slaughter. Having known fifty-sixty years ago the equivalent of today's Neo-Cons, who happily ensconced in the comfort and safety of their game theories or, now, palatial think tanks, could dispatch one hundred million persons without remorse, Rand Corporation military intellectuals, in tennis whites, I recognize the cynicism that goes with the strategic-studies psychology and want *no part of it*. How then defend North Korea on any grounds?

Easy. On more enlightened patriotic grounds (not my wont, but not altogether superficial), one could say that any factor which halts America's march to unilateral global dominance does America a favor by saving it from self-destruction or, possibly worse, a barren landscape of alienated, sated lives, in which supremacy earns the hatred of remaining humankind. The world is not for bullying. North Korea is an example of the *multipolar* dispersal of global power (China, of course, a still better one), a decentralized system that leads away from an hubristic outcome guaranteed to ensure ultimate defeat—or the total fascisization via unrestrained warfare of the international system. This is the direction we are heading. To the US juggernaut, North Korea is a mere impediment to be crushed in all good time, hence a stand-in for China which, since 1949, has been correctly viewed as the ultimate barrier to world domination.

*Realpolitik* helps in the weighing of consequences, here, a decision to favor the North Korean military build-up as preferable to the seemingly democratic globalization of American power, essentially a counterrevolutionary imperium perverse of all democratic mass movements. This is not for the sake of North Korea, which, given the existing alliance systems, could well withstand American pressures for some time, but for the sake of a variegated world order not suffocated by the institutions of mature capitalism, and thus, where people remain free to determine the structure of their political economies and the content of their social values not threatened by internal subversion or external conquest.

I do not come to this position lightly. For me, the advanced stage of capitalism, in which militarization of its structure, values, and hierarchical social relations *is* the dynamic element of its mature organization, reveals an inner core of fascism, waiting to be activated through war, depression, or other cataclysmic event. With complexity comes potential destabilization. (Max Weber's insight, as I interpret his Theory of Social and Economic Organization, is that at the heart of the rational-legal order lies the charismatic, testifying to capitalism's fragility and need for absolute order.) From a democratic standpoint, stripped of nationalistic fervor, North Korea—returning to our analysis—cannot possibly inflict the global damage of which the United States is capable, not because of size or nuclear arsenal, but because of electing to stand on the wrong side of history. Counterrevolution in a world bursting with energies can bring down the Temple, but not greet the new dawn. America has had its chance to work with emerging nations, to welcome social-structural change, to wield its influence for peace rather than war, and in every instance since at least the aftermath of World War II has fallen flat on its face. It doesn't take F. Scott Fitzgerald to tell us, there are no second chances. History does that for us.

I submit, the Korean War, to which present-day developments refer back, was not only about the power struggle on the Peninsula, in effect an ideological microcosm of, and previewing, the Cold War, just as, earlier, the Spanish Civil War previewed World War II, although it certainly was that. But in addition it was the *dress rehearsal*, like Spain, with Syngman Rhee and Francisco Franco having interchangeable roles, for the still grander struggle that even World War II presaged: the survival of capitalism as the predominant, even exclusive, world system, against multiple

challenges from the Center and Left having in common anticolonialism and/or different forms and degrees of socialist and mixed economies. We saw, America chose Rhee as the defender of “freedom,” signaling on all sides, and pointedly, national liberation struggles, its global guardianship of the Right which meshes perfectly with its future right-wing political-ideological course. The Korean War reveals the *fascist potential* of mature capitalism.

To evaluate North Korean actions today, one must revisit the historical context of yesterday. For the US, China loomed large over everything—perceived, mistakenly or not, as a revolutionary force, which had successfully resisted American pressures to keep in power a corrupt dictatorship. We “lost” China to the Communists, according to the China Lobby, which, by the then politics, represented the Far Right of the Republicans, but actually were kissing cousins of those supporting Obama’s Pacific-first strategy today, the endless dream of reconquering China for world capitalism in general, and American-defined market ambitions in particular. Only this time, the world has moved beyond the geopolitical vision of a simpler era, making Far Eastern stabilization, commercial-financial penetration, and military dominance more difficult if not impossible to achieve. The US, however, still feels up to the task, so that a hard-boiled, ideological stance toward North Korea has become inseparable from the postponed though always to be acted upon confrontation with China. America’s choice of fighting proxy wars until the field is cleared for decisive ideological resolution (an apt characterization of the Korean War) is no longer historically realizable, now, because North Korea is unwilling to play by the old ground rules (although not apparent, it, like North Vietnam, has cast its response to America in national-liberation terms), and because China itself has become immeasurably stronger in the intervening decades. Not, as we presently see, does this necessarily mean that China has North Korea’s back. (Apr. 7, China’s new president, Xi Jinping, referring to the rising tensions on the Peninsula, said that no Asian country “should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain.”) Neither China nor Russia has exemplified the revolutionary fervor of international communism when self-interest intrudes, a fervor more in the telling than in the doing.

Thus it appears that North Korea has been hung out to dry, a condition which may account for its note of stridency. My support does not rest on sympathy, although one person’s ideological constancy is another’s rigidity, and in a period when socialism is under attack, even from within, courage not to capitulate (as in the case of North Korea) has to count for something. In fact, capitalism—hegemony looking down from the heights—has invariably been guided by the falling-domino theory, the question “What if?” prompting extremes of punitive response, as in: *what if* Cuba, Chile, Venezuela, succeed, or here, North Korea, will that accelerate the revolutionary process, or contrariwise, halt or slow down the reconquest of indigenous peoples, countries in early stages of socialist industrial experimentation, and lands rich in natural resources? The US has a lot riding on the determination of that question, its stake in the world system, including its ability to exploit, siphon off, extract, take by force for its own welfare the vast sources of global wealth, leaving others in a weakened state of dependence showing gratitude for the right to exist.

North Korea, if still remaining a surrogate for China, also, by US standards, is worth destroying in its own right. Kim Jung Un is playing into our hands. While it is forever the custom to portray the victim as the aggressor, the current example of demonization—“the untested young leader,” repeated ad nauseum—has White House management written all over itself. Curiously, no-one has noted similarities between North Korea and Israel, or rather, what the former is accused of (reckless



nuclear diplomacy), which for the latter, is deemed praiseworthy. Militarism for one, is peaceful defense of the homeland for the other. That the double standard is so easy to detect, suggests the opportunism of the Obama course, the hoped-for “miscalculation” on North Korea’s part providing pretext for demonstrating to the world American military glory and might.

It is not necessary here to return to the causative factors involved in the Korean War itself, although, to appreciate the continuities in the United States position, 1950 to the present, several points should be made. In the aftermath of World War II, the thrust of American policy was Europe-centered, to provide a military-political bulwark against Soviet expansion and/or ideological influence westward, contention focused on Germany, Eastern Europe, and via the reparations question (Germany) the rebuilding of war-devastated Russia. Complementing the emphasis on anticommunism was the American planning, from at least 1943, of market penetration into Europe, including the trade restrictions posed by the British and French imperial systems. The Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and justly famous paper, NSC-68, the National Security Council blueprint for increased military spending and sharply clarified geopolitical aims, all together constitute a far-reaching global posture the US would take in response to communism, Third World emerging industrial economies, and the structuring of the global economy, its stabilization to ensure American access to essential raw materials as well as the wider imperatives of enlarging trade (an outgrowth, in part, of fears of the onset of another Great Depression).

The US is poised even before 1950 to embark on a unilateral course, with the assistance of international organizations it was instrumental in creating (notably the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), to construct a global framework maximizing the advantages of American capitalism in an environment which would preserve world capitalism itself. 1949, reasonably confident about events in Europe, the US suddenly faces epochal changes: the fall of China, the Soviet success in testing an atomic bomb, *and* a growing recognition of decolonialism, national liberation struggles, and in Vietnam the French, despite American assistance, about to be thrown out—a collapsing world in all respects, particularly in light of postwar expectations of American power.

Precisely then, the Korean War breaks out, June, 1950, which occurs within a policy-context bewildering, in the sense of raising multipronged issues and requiring a balancing act to stretch resources in the face of a seemingly universal communist threat. Truman (Acheson in the shadows) immediately responds to what appears the North Korean invasion of the South. I’m not clear about who started the conflict, nor, in hindsight, is that as important as the fact that *both* sides were engaged in war preparations and were destined to be pawns in a Great Powers’ struggle. The Korean War, as I’ve maintained, was fought over geopolitical considerations far greater than concerned the immediate parties. Russia, like the US, feared the consequences of national liberation currents, as a threat to its bloc, but it also strongly believed that an American-sponsored South, in conjunction with the rearming of Japan, would pose a security threat leaving it vulnerable. America saw danger everywhere, especially given its strong assistance to the South, which, if defeated, would possibly hearten the forces of social revolution throughout the Third World. And naturally, there was China right around the corner. Intervention became axiomatic among the key Truman advisers.

In addition to this formative context for US-North Korean relations, it may be helpful to review the areas of friction between the two nations during the Obama administration, when I first became

aware of cumulative tensions themselves the product of Obama's "pivot" to the Pacific and intended isolation and containment of China. North Korea draws America's attention to the Pacific, affording the path for making incremental advances, and the positioning of forces (especially naval power, such as the role assigned supercarriers), in the ultimate—and to policy makers, inevitable—showdown with China. Dramatizing, i.e., exposing, the US counterrevolutionary posture, with the Pacific the designated region of choice (for obvious reasons going back to America's reliance on and fascination with the Open Door), North Korea is like the canary in the mine, an early warning system of potential world conflagration. In 1950 it may have been America's doormat on which we wiped our feet in responding to the siren song of vast markets and equally vast populations, the symbolic import, beyond the crassness of commercial penetration, of the Far East, as we then proceeded forward in grounding down popular resistance to our selfsame grubby purposes.

Now, is different. No longer do the old stereotypes apply. America has met its match, and for that I am thankful—the highest patriotism, I believe, lies in the direction of cleansing the detritus of poisonous wastes from the social order. Racism, militarism, exploitative capitalism, for starters, but it's America's choice how the purificatory process is accomplished, whether through self-destructive combativeness or humanitarian release. In this regard, North Korea becomes a window into the American soul. Why is the situation different? Long term political (global stabilization)-economic (markets and materials)-ideological (salvational capitalism) objectives remain the same, but the decentralization of the world power structure, coupled with the fact that America in its continued pursuit and maintenance of these objectives has *overextended* itself, has led to the proportionate decline in American power. Hence when I say "I am thankful," I have little doubt that America would be a better place, more democratic, internally and on the world stage, if it could come to terms with its role of one among many, exchanging humility for hubris, focusing on America's own problems rather than buttressing its ruling elites through militarism and a bloated defense budget.

Points of friction, precipitated by Obama's aggressive designs on China and the Far Pacific, following the "normalized" burdens placed on North Korea (e.g., trade embargoes), *annual* joint military exercises in the region, base concentrations, etc., then continued and perhaps intensified by his administration, can be noted through reading the *New York Times*, a hardly exhaustive record but convenient to our present purposes. I present in chronological order my relevant Comments to the paper, unaltered, as an informal running political journal (some of which entries, perhaps too strong for its liberal sensibility, and I use "liberal," as would any radical, pejoratively, being deemed *not* publication-worthy):

Starting with Nov. 23, 2010, one sees the report of increasing tensions between the North and the South based on mutual firings (the North's shelling of Yeonpyeong island receiving the most attention), which had as their context US military activity in the area, joint maneuvers, the visit of a Stanford physicist to the North's nuclear facility, and the North's food shortages because of the blockade:

Is it possible to step back and review the events, or must one immediately leap to the conclusion of a North Korean "provocation" against South Korea? Yes, the North is in dire straits—yet, we see the West using the denial of food relief as a political weapon to force submission to Western policies. More directly, recently the US engaged in sea exercises off North Korea with an incredibly major show of force. We also see South Korea testing missiles in disputed waters claimed by the

North. And of course, the mobilization of 70,000 South Korean troops in exercises intended to simulate an invasion of the North.

Perhaps North Korea is wrong here, but the term “provocation” can also be labeled against the South. And Mr. Obama’s recent Asian trip cannot be neglected for its relevancy to North Korean behavior: The ploy about American job-creation as the rationale for the trip smells to the heavens. The purpose of the trip, as one conservative approvingly noted in an op-ed piece for *The Times*, was to surround China with an American-sponsored alliance system, one that also would promote the further isolation of North Korea. The display to an eminently qualified American nuclear physicist of advances made in North Korea in weapons research and development is not surprising when the fuller geopolitical context is filled in: North Korea wants incorporation into the world community, but on terms which honor its political and economic autonomy.

Nearly two months later, the *Times* views the cumulating tensions on the Peninsula, typically, through Cold War spectacles, implicitly ratifying Obama’s Pacific strategy while defining political engagement in the same way Israelis do with respect to the Palestinians—show no mercy; the beauties of force:

When the editorial states that “there is also a real danger that the North Korean government will misread any opening as weakness and an invitation to act out even more,” *The Times* gives voice to the very mental set that has long characterized (sixty years) Cold War assumptions and, not incidentally, legitimizes vast military outlays (more than the rest of the world combined): Openness = weakness; always be tough, lest America become subject to attack; security can best be realized through a state of perpetual war. In a word, demonize, demonize, demonize. Indeed, you do not even see the contradiction when you speak of Pres. Obama’s policy of “strategic patience,” for in explanation you write: “He promised engagement, tightened sanctions [and] strengthened regional alliances....” In sum, engage by showing toughness. Appropos of that, we find in this very week Sec. Gates negotiating an arms treaty with Japan that is hardly intended to promote a pacific climate in the region. Nor is the US position on Okinawa encouraging, for even to Japan we tell them what and where our bases will be, like it or not.

Perhaps abandon your belligerence long enough to take a cooler appraisal of the situation, and be more candid about your attitudes toward China, which on numerous occasions is little more than China-bashing.

Toward the close of 2011, with the death of Kim Jong-il, we see the *Times* in full battle gear describing him, under the heading, “North Korean Dictator,” in demonian terms as one “who realized his family’s dream of turning his starving, isolated country into a nuclear-weapons power even as it sank further into despotism,” an obituary suggesting that with friends like this one surely doesn’t need enemies:

The Obama administration could not ask for a better Christmas gift than the death of Mr. Kim. Everything appears so predictable, right down to the war games provided for such an eventuality. By predictable, I mean: drive home the anxiety and fear; have South Korea maintain a high state of alert; push North Korea into further isolation in the world community by assuming its tendency toward war. Did it occur to anyone that sympathy might be expressed to the North Korean people at Mr. Kim’s death?

Mr. Obama has won a major public relations victory for his Pacific Rim strategy. North Korea was never the real enemy. It was, and now more clearly than perhaps at any time in the last four decades, remains CHINA. Escalate the tensions, flex Uncle Sam's muscles, do anything but move in the direction of world peace. Mr. Obama is in a masculinity contest with the Republicans to see who can be the tougher, who can be the more militaristic, who can best achieve economic growth through war and the preparation for war.

On Dec. 22, three days later, Nicholas Kristof wrote that diplomacy should trump belligerence in this case, to which I felt compelled to add: "...a dose of outreach."

I appreciate Mr. Kristof's good sense, which regrettably is not shared by the administration. For over a half-century a large number of US troops have been stationed in South Korea, as well as vast sums in military aid to that country. This is never mentioned, even though it would be provocation enough facing any country. Now, however, matters are still worse, with Mr. Obama's Pacific Rim strategy: Isolation for North Korea is compounded by the explicit desire to encircle China. Poor Japan, with US pressures on it to maintain a nuclear arsenal.

We are fishing quite literally in troubled waters. Is it too cynical to say that in addition to assisting American business in the Far East (Boeing and General Electric are two of the President's favorites), Mr. Obama is also using the Pacific Rim strategy to rekindle a Cold-War mentality among the American people in order to divert attention from a less than adequate domestic program? North Korea may have its loudspeakers, but we seem blessed by a sea of rhetoric bearing no relation to actual achievement.

On Dec. 27 the *Times* published an intriguing and significant article about the invited South Korean delegation, led by Lee Hee-ho (wife of a former president), which visited to express condolences to Kim Jong-un after his father's death, at which, as the lead states, "North Korea Asks South to Restore Deal to Spur Investment." In other words, there were grounds for reconciliation (reinstatement of a trade pact the South scuttled five years before), if it were not for US efforts to stir controversy. But peace is the furthest thing from the US's mind:

Much to the undoubted consternation of the United States, peace may break out on the Korean Peninsula. I am amused at the comments whenever North Korea is mentioned in these last few weeks in The Times. When I suggested condolences might be expressed by President Obama, someone replied, as per usual, that we cannot show weakness to the barbarous regime. By implication: let's keep North Korea isolated and militarily surrounded. Squeeze 'em till it hurts. Meanwhile, this holier-than-thou attitude conveniently hides our own acts of barbarism, whether in Iraq and Afghanistan, or, earlier, throughout Latin America. Let's somehow get beyond demonization as national policy. That will be hard, if not impossible. The Obama administration is particularly belligerent, with its announcement of the Pacific Rim strategy and the avowed intent to encircle China. Knee-jerk hostility serves a failed presidency well; for it permits the maintenance of an all-time high defense budget, the continued stationing of huge numbers of troops in South Korea, and the equally continuous build-up of military bases worldwide. Oh yes, people are in dire straits at home, with pawn shops—replete with Santa Clauses—the preferred sites for Christmas shopping. Mortgage foreclosures continue apace, while the president luxuriates in Hawaii.

But don't criticize! Only communists, fellow travelers, and now, Pakistanis (smarting under the use of drones from their soil), are un-American.

Two days later the *Times* reported on the installation of the new leader, "At Huge Rally, North Koreans Declare Kim Their Leader," the article sprinkled with the usual stereotypes, "hermetic country," Kim as young, untested, etc., but more interesting, the absence of informed criticism, the venomous replies of readers, which drew my reaction thusly:

... another occasion for venting spleen toward North Korea by your posters, many of whom, to be sure, are 120% Americans introjecting our military prowess and demonstrating to the world America's conviction of nonpareil status and power. Frankly, I would be prepared to hear informed criticism of North Korea PROVIDED we simultaneously were candid about our own faults, particularly our geopolitical role in the world and the implicit militarism which unifies the American people in support of it. As a child I learned, Don't throw stones at glass houses. Consider our large military presence in South Korea for more than a half-century. Consider our war in Vietnam, which to this day has not drawn the outrage commensurate with the unwarranted and brutal intervention. Consider our training of death squads for Latin America at Fort Benning. Consider our wholly unjustified wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the former based on official lies, the latter, as part of a global strategy of trade penetration and influence, NOW carried to a new dimension by President Obama with his Pacific Rim strategy, intended for the encirclement of China. (Indeed, our demonizing of North Korea is inseparable from our attempt to contain China, the new whipping boy to supplant Russia in our carefully orchestrated effort to popularize a Cold War mentality.) When critics of North Korea, each outdoing the other in vituperation, are also willing to look inward, then I will listen.

Apr. 12, 2012 North Korea suffered humiliation when its rocket launching of a satellite was a disaster, a "humiliation" no doubt felt domestically, yet magnified by the *Times*, as the Obama administration, not hiding its delight, began to explore options (after halting food relief):

If the satellite is merely "a dishwasher wrapped in tinfoil," then why all the fuss? The answer is obvious: Historically the US placed its credibility foremost, not simply as an abstraction, but as signifying its claim to exclusive superpower status. With that claim in doubt (indeed, clearly no longer even tenable), combined with Mr. Obama's assertion of the US as a Pacific power, the satellite launching hits us in the psychological belly. The response is pitiful. For sixty years, and not only with respect to North Korea, the US has treated the internal affairs of other countries—usually smaller, weaker—with contempt. Even China, which Republicans screamed in the early '50s, was "lost" (presumably by Adlai Stevenson), as though she was ours to lose. What monstrous geopolitical ego, as though America, by natural right, can determine other nations' conduct and destiny. So here again, the use of "options"—why not just nuke 'em! is probably a refrain running through the American psyche. We isolate North Korea internationally for six decades because they do not exemplify Friedmanite free-market economics, and after we isolate them—a squeeze bringing the population close to starvation—we then proceed to blame them for their isolation and point to their impoverished condition as confirmation of their presumed inferior ways. A

win-win for American foreign policy, except that the world is changing and the victims want to be heard. The launching is not our business.

The following day, Apr. 13, the *Times*, under “North Korean Launch Failure,” delineated more clearly how that nation had been conceived in administration circles as part of a unified containment strategy directed at China:

Gloating over the launch failure reveals the infantile thinking and behavior which characterize American foreign policy. Why, given the US hostility to North Korea for six decades, should not its government be concerned about creating a nuclear deterrent? We seem ready to demonize whomever resists the blandishments of market fundamentalism. Obviously the poverty we ridicule the regime for is a consequence of our own effort at embargo, encirclement, and international ostracism. I feel sorry for the North Koreans because they have from the start been a pawn in great-power politics. What we can’t do, by way of internal intervention via economic pressures, against China, we take out on them. Now Pres. Obama goes a significant step beyond Bush Two, with his Pacific-first strategy making the United States, by design, the exclusive superpower in the region. China replaces Russia as the Cold War enemy. We had a glimpse of that this week with the report on Littoral Combat Ships, a huge waste of money—far more than is alleged about the launch failure—in its own right, and particularly vexatious when Americans at home remain unemployed, foreclosed, and threatened with the destruction of the social safety net. People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones; there may come a time when it is the North Koreans’ turn to look down on the US, suffocating in military waste and, out of greed, nipping at each other’s heels. We are hardly shining examples of moral behavior.

That same day, in response to *Times* posters’ driving home the point that North Korea should be subject to short shrift, I replied (with the foregoing in hand):

Hi Jack and publius, Thanks for your replies. Jack, if relying on military spending to produce weaponry is a means of solving the unemployment problem, I’d rather see the US go down the tubes; rather, why not public works, which really brings large numbers into the workforce, instills pride and respect (read about the achievements of CCC, WPA, and PWA in the New Deal), and addresses shocking deficiencies of infrastructure. Your vaunted military-industrial complex has left a lot of children in America malnourished. My concern goes deeper: by winning labor over to large defense expenditures, the result is to make labor a cheering section for militarism. This, regrettably, has been the history of labor since the 1950s (and of the way the Democratic party has fully subscribed to the Cold War mental set still with us.) I happen to believe that militarism—now, Obama’s China policy and huge defense budgets, as well as his cosiness with the military and intelligence communities—is destructive of democracy. Publius, on North Korea, I suggest you go back to 1950 and the Korean War, and whether or not the South was ready—with US support and blessings—to attack first. South Korea under Rhee was every bit a dictatorship as the North. More basic, our concern then, and now, was/is China. We isolated the North as a warning to China and to justify huge troop numbers and bases in the South. We strangled the North and then blame them for their forced austerity.

And now we come to the very recent past; thus far, it can be seen that North Korea, although not receiving the national attention reserved for Iran, is integral to the global geopolitical strategy of the United States, registering boldly on the radar screen because of its development of nuclear weapons and, with the missile launches, their delivery systems. Here the *Times*' Mark Landler, reporting on the administration's China policy, "A Measure of Change: Obama's Journey to Tougher Tack on a Rising China," (Sept. 21, 2012), while not recognizing the president's initial posture of hostility toward China, reveals the dimensions of the Pacific Rim strategy. North Korea is not mentioned in the article, but its place as a stepping stone to major confrontation with China follows from America's regional ambitions. This is all about playing hard-ball, from lecturing Hu Jintao to filing cases before the WTO alleging trade discrimination to shoring up alliance systems, even to stationing marines in Australia. This belligerence, intentionally antagonizing China, was not lost on the North Koreans as well:

Landler presents important information, but I believe he misses the larger picture. Obama's Pacific-first strategy goes to the heart of America's present geopolitical vision. This is not about tiny islands or Obama's affinity for Asian culture and landscape. It is no coincidence that Rhodes, who wrote the Cairo speech, is an architect of the policy. As many observers have come to realize, Obama the candidate and in his first months in office is very different from his subsequent presidency, a difference like night and day, or peace and war. Obama is realpolitick par excellence. He is also the global salesman for American business and guardian of the hierarchical shape of the US economy, including—following Bill Clinton and his team of deregulators—the trend toward financialization. In these respects, China is the supreme challenge to Americal global military, political, and economic dominance—as in its African and Latin American investments. Most important, Obama has in fact geared the US's military buildup with China specifically in mind. He has invested billions in a new generation of nuclear weapons and the vehicles for their deliverance. This still is largely unreported, although The Times did have an article on the littoral craft suited to the mission. Contrary to Washington denials, this is a policy of encirclement. The Chinese are not stupid. They recognize, from naval power to influence in South Asia, US fears of decline—to be prevented at all costs.

Moving ahead to Feb. 12, 2013, *Times* reporters Neil MacFarquhar and Jane Perlez, under the heading, "China Looms Over Response to Nuclear Test by North Korea," we see that the North's planned third test, on the eve of Obama's State of the Union address, makes clear that China, though not accused directly, is viewed as controlling the North, and hence bears responsibility (and presumably faces retribution) if the North continues its testing program. China, despite its present criticism of the North, does not intend a fundamental break, its reasoning—according to the reporters—being quite revealing. Hu Jintao will not "move quickly to change the nation's long-held policy of propping-up the walled-off government that has long served *as a buffer against closer intrusion by the United States* on the Korean Peninsula." (Italics, mine) China recognizes the high stakes involved in US intervention, especially in the context of Obama's Pacific-first strategy:

"Blowback" slides easily off the tongue, but it is true. As a young man in the 1950s I demonstrated for nuclear disarmament and, esp., the end of testing. I earned my stripes. Thus I can now say, misanthropic and contradictory as it sounds, GREAT, let North Korea go on. I'm sure I'm the only voice in America saying this.

The value of North Korea's activity lies in that it further contributes to a multipolar world, rather than allow the US to seek and partly achieve unilateral global military, political, and financial dominance. We have had it our way too long—since 1945, serving as a global counterrevolutionary force, with interventions, forcible market domination, etc. Still today, with Obama's State of the Union coming up, we are mired in deception. E.g., New Start provided for the “modernization” of nuclear weaponry, i.e., reduce the stock, increase the LETHALITY of what remains. Plus, no doubt, a new generation of nuclear weapons is in the pipeline. Perhaps it takes a North Korean nuclear program to bring the US to its senses—and, for a change, a modicum of honesty. To wit, we are presently egging Japan on to become nuclear, in violation of Art. 9 of its Constitution, all for the purpose of confronting China.

The US will have to learn to live with China, along with Brazil and other economic powerhouses, and not use its arsenal as an intimidatory force. The timing is excellent, to highlight Obama's hypocrisy in tonight's speech.

March 16, Chuck Hagel, as the new Secretary of Defense, signaled that nothing had changed, only, rather, intensified, in announcing, as reported by Thom Shanker, et. al, “U.S. Is Bolstering Missile Defense to Deter North Korea,” that the US would “deploy additional ballistic missile interceptors along the Pacific Coast to counter the growing reach of North Korea's weapons....” The cost, \$1B. The locations: California, Alaska. The purpose: given the limited range of their missiles, war hysteria, preparedness, an escalation of home defense. The head of the US Strategic Command said in Senate Armed Services testimony that an additional site on the East Coast may be needed to deter *Iran*. In effect, the clock is ticking:

There we go again. North Korea is a blessing; its “caustic” talk gives the US a shot in the arm for further military spending, for stirring up our people as a way of gaining consent for more weaponry, more interventions, more effort to retain a #1 global military-economic posture as in fact America is in decline. There is no mention of how North Korea's actions relate to Obama's Pacific-first strategy, the notorious “pivot” in which military forces and diplomatic efforts are being focused on the containment of China—from supercarriers, littoral craft, long-range bombers to joint maneuvers, shored-up alliances, and the encouragement of Japan to go nuclear, it is the US, not North Korea, which represents a MENACE to world peace in the region. Disguise it as one will, the US is delighted with, and has deliberately egged on, North Korean belligerence. The actual Obama-Brennan doctrine, vivified in the program of armed drones for targeted assassination, is PERMANENT WAR. Obama represents the restoration of the 1950s Cold War climate—perhaps Bradley Manning can be “our” Rosenbergs. Secrecy, intolerance of dissent, phobic reaction to revealing war crimes—we see a self-inflicted National Security State of drones at home soon in place to intensify surveillance, self-inflicted because leading further into the muck of authoritarianism. Here Democrats are indivisibly linked to Republicans; the political order is a sham.

Finally, the *Times* editorial on Secretary Kerry's visit to South Korea, praise for his sensible toughness—cool words, yet total confrontation should US demands on denuclearization not be met (Apr. 13, 2013). Next stop, China, a no doubt polite lecture on its fault for not reigning in the North, Kerry, much to the dismay of many who earlier supported him, not skipping a beat from his predecessor:



Despite the diplomatic language, Sec. Kerry resumes the saber-rattling which has characterized US policy toward North Korea from the start. Frankness is in order. The US cares little about North Korea, which has always in policymakers' eyes been a surrogate for China. The Korean War began the year after the fall of China (which also saw the first Soviet test of an atomic bomb). In sum the present conflict is in straightline continuity with 1950: a Cold War framework, with China rather than Russia the adversary. Still determinative is the US resistance to national liberation struggles, Third World progress toward industrialization, and autonomous modernization—all of which, after decades is still part of the historical process, and all inimical to US interests. China, not North Korea, poses the challenge of global trade-and-investment penetration—obviously, but North Korea takes on importance because its very existence and recent activity is a reminder that the world power structure is becoming decentralized: a multipolar world, in which the US can no longer assert unilateral efforts of American-defined stabilization.

Following Obama's reelection the *Times* had an editorial, "The Foreign Policy Agenda," (Nov. 11, 2012), which said in part: "Mr. Obama is expected to use his second term to deepen engagement with Asia to protect American military interests and ensure American access to economic opportunities in that region." Military interests plus access to economic opportunities = precisely the militarization of US capitalism we have come to recognize, not only in the Pacific-first strategy but also the ruling principle for American policy in general—counterrevolution with no shame, only gladness.

APRIL 18, 2013

### **America, Kingdom of the Armed**

I cried Monday evening when I first heard the news. Deaths, severed legs, chaos, disbelief, silence. Maybe I cried because as a runner in my youth I somehow *knew* the immediate experience, desecration of an intensely human celebration of life. Then slowly the larger picture came into view: the victims, extent of casualties, details however incomplete of the devices used, the insinuating remarks of the president hinting of terrorism as we've come to believe its presumed origins to be. Vindication that Homeland Security was always on the right track since 9/11, a subliminal endorsement of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, secrecy and the National Security State, the comparative safety enjoyed by Americans for a dozen years thanks to the noble efforts of Bush, Obama, and their national-security advisors.

It all made sense in, say, the first thirty-six hours: What better time and place for our "enemies" to strike back than on Patriots Day, in a wholly unexpected venue calculated to elicit maximum fears on the part of the people and nation. At this writing, nothing has changed, causation implicitly directed to foreign unnamed sources. But wait, even here there were two perplexing details, obvious to even a rank amateur, which simply did not fit the supposedly recognizable pattern. 1) No-one has come forward to claim responsibility; 2) the device, so primitive, right down to the timer and the nails, etc., and the timing—only some 15 seconds apart—hardly calculated to inflict the widest possible harm. Yesterday, my thought was seemingly out of the blue (and perhaps running the risk of being conspiracy-theory oriented), namely, the perpetrator, one seemed sufficient, was a twisted mind, angered by the growing sentiment in and out of Congress for some form of guncontrols, and

in perfectly logical (to individuals whose psychopathology of imagined deprivation of rights) thinking, reached the conclusion that right now a vivid act of terrorism would arouse the American people to see the need for self-protection via, of course, still more extensive gun ownership.

Create the need, and the solution follows. America is not armed enough. Danger lurks everywhere. NRA has been right from the start: arm the school teachers, arm the theater ushers, pack in the parks, the picnic grounds, because you can never tell when terrorism will strike—thought processes not different from and perhaps growing out of centuries of racism where blacks were the ferocious beast, the enemy at the gates, and, running a weak second, industrial labor, unions, militance, stealing our hard-earned earnings. Other candidates in the wings, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: immigrants, especially from southern and eastern Europe, Jews in particular, the growing underclass of poor in the teeming cities, together an undifferentiated mass threatening the American Way of Life. Ethnocentrism run wild, authoritarianism its central element, incipient fascism its likely issuance, if not already.

All of this seemed clear—until today's *New York Times* (Apr. 17), although no connections even remotely have been made. Patriots Day, the Marathon, sure a natural target, symbolically a “two-fer,” the occasion, a sacred symbol, patriotism itself, Paul Revere's ride, and the marathon, the test of will, example of internationalism, purity of effort (nonmaterialism). But that explanation didn't satisfy, as being not sufficiently specific, gun legislation in the air or not. The *Times*, however, on the front page brought out the aspect I had not seen before, nor had the media emphasized or mentioned. For many, the Boston Marathon was a memorial for the dead children at Newtown's Sandy Hook elementary school—confirmed by a banner at the finish line, the participation of runners from Newtown, the interviews of others who wanted to honor those who died.

I submit, this was not the work of al-Qaeda or other group, but American, as having the last word on Newtown, the crazed endeavor to plod or plow ahead with gun rights, and defy all sense of decency, with an act of flagrant contempt for and profanation of human life, all for the sake of keeping at bay the imagined butchers, savages, ravagers who want to destroy America. Only guns stand in the way between *them* and *us*. This, admittedly, is conjecture on my part, but it fits so well the national picture, the legitimation for depriving others of human life in a still wider circle, now, holy of holies, in the name of *national security*. I refer specifically to the program sanctioned at the highest level of authorization, Obama's armed drones for targeted assassination. Political-ideological dementedness above, has a way of sending shock waves through the remainder of society.

If I am wrong, and my gut feeling is that the culprit(s) will never be identified, I still maintain that such acts of barbarism as presidential assassination, global provocations, and the cynical celebration of wealth at home, create the ambience of lawlessness and disrespect for human integrity which make of America the kingdom of the armed and the sanctification of violence.

APRIL 22, 2013

### **The Consuming Evil of Violence**

In case *CounterPunch* readers missed the latest US commission of atrocities, the April 7<sup>th</sup> air strike in Afghanistan that killed seventeen (including twelve children), as reported in the *New York*

*Times* this past week, a photo of the graves of several of the children on a sandy hillside as part of the article, I offer these thoughts on the Obama presidency which directly speak to that event as well as countless others.

As a nation we are reeling in response to the horrible bombing at the Boston Marathon, just as we felt after the Newtown shootings. Rightly so, for Americans still have a heart, an irreducible compassion, when our own people are affected...and yet, under continued pressure, as exemplified by the policies of the US government now into decades (say, beginning with Vietnam), even that sense of moral decency is in danger of fading. We see it in the public opinion polls measuring sentiment concerning the policy and practice of armed drones for purposes of targeted assassination, a program greatly magnified and fitted into a geopolitical framework far more vicious and lethal done under Obama than Bush 2, in which the American public is less ready to approve of this when American citizens are killed than, by a wide margin, the murdered are not American. Ethnocentrism in its ugliest form has taken over, a chilling consequence—long in the making, from 19<sup>th</sup> century Know-Nothing anti-immigration sentiment to post-World War II Cold War hostile feelings—of, and intensified by, the counterterrorism defining the current political climate.

Gun violence is merely symptomatic, not causative by any means, of the foundational alienation and cynicism produced by the American variant of advanced capitalism (not to this point, indicative of other nation's capitalist systems of similar maturity), and therefore a peculiar uniqueness of the US case based on its own historical-institutional configuration which precluded socialism and alternative political and economic modes of organization. How else produce a Bush II, or much worse, because deceptively costumed in liberal finery, Barack Obama, the perfect caricature of the statesman, friend of the poor and minorities, peace advocate, treacherous beyond imagination once his domestic and foreign policies are examined?

And yet, we still believe; nothing appears to shake our confidence, such as a dot in the landscape, those murdered children in Afghanistan—or the hundreds of murdered children caused by our drone attacks in Pakistan, Yemen, Somali, wherever Obama, Brennan, and their National Security Team meeting on Terror Tuesdays decide to terrorize and kill next.

In the name of patriotism, Protection of the Homeland, our noble warriors, democracy itself, to which America claims a special guardianship, we see a *military budget* and corresponding show of global force not simply unprecedented in world history, but also destroying the very fabric of American values and social norms, a corruption of mind and society leading to a structural cleavage of wealth and power seen nowhere thus far outside of dystopian fiction: authoritarian, still (but for how long?) with velvet glove.

Do I exaggerate?

Foreign policy is a total disaster, if not world menace, confirmed by real and potential interventions, but now with a new emphasis, the secret weapon of covert operations, secret because shrouded that way, unaccountable, below the radar screen of international legality, and concretely, bringing together in *paramilitary* mode the expanded powers of CIA joined to Special Ops, and even private mercenaries and, as in Afghanistan, CIA-trained (as part of the blandly worded “security structure”) local militias. Mobile strike forces—nevertheless backed by traditional heavy main-force constituents of power: land, sea, air, from Stealth bombers to supercarriers, all discreetly supported by, of course, America's vast nuclear arsenal.

Obama has done nothing to reverse this trend, but obviously to extend and heighten it, partly under the cover of counterterrorism, but more, the conscious desire to shore up a, in world terms of multipolar centers of power, declining global hegemonic position, and in the process redefine American military objectives through the (in)famous pivot of US attention and the deployment of forces to what might rightly be characterized as the Pacific theater of war.

Inseparable from the enhanced militaristic posture, is the diplomatic. Here the State Department might just as well be fused with the Pentagon, Kerry and Hagel, already in their brief tenure, skipping and hopping around the world, seeking and giving assurances to cement more firmly alliances with “friends and allies,” dependable partners in current and future interventions designed to maintain an American-defined globalized system. That cost money, in some cases, bag money, in others, support for regimes and policies antithetical both to world peace and the internal democratic content of the willing partner.

Trouble spots, as perceived by the US, are poked to ensure that situations are kept volatile, from North Korea to Iran to Venezuela, for how else keep the American people on tenterhooks, eager to approve war crimes abroad, surveillance, Espionage-Act prosecutions, defense spending at home, and farther afield, encourage Japan and the Philippines, above all, Israel, to stay on edge, confrontational, fully in alignment with what the US defines as the pattern of engagement? Not only has the Obama-Brennan doctrine of permanent war, embodied in the drone program and paramilitary operations, been put into effect, but so has its companion setting, an endeavor to place the world on a war-footing. Otherwise, all those military bases, stationed troops, modernized nuclear weapons, huge embassies, foreign assistance and diplomatic stratagems and pressures would appear groundless and transparently aggressive (which they are).

Militarism is not a healthy sign for a domestic, or for that matter, democratic, social framework. Here it would be helpful to apply the idea of *legitimated violence* to America itself, with Obama its practitioner par excellence. As other CP writers have noted, the thrust of current policy is directed to class warfare against the poor, as in the recent articles by Hudson and Lindorff—violence through legal means which fosters declining living standards (e.g., the chained-CPI) among seniors, the disabled, the poor generally, simultaneous with favoring extreme wealth, through sophisticated taxation policies, including the lesser rate on capital gains, as well as deregulation, making for exorbitant banking profits, corporate subsidies and write-offs, lessened safety standards, weakened labor rights, legal provisions protective of vested interests, the business-friendly dimensions of the Obama administration sufficiently extensive to fill the thickest phone directory. Again, legitimated violence, not only because done under the law (how else are the laws written?), but also because filling in the content of the main trends in American capitalism at least since the Civil War—and by *violence* I emphatically mean the deliberate practice of deprivation against those insufficiently able to resist or fight back. Degradation, false consciousness on the receiving end, invidious distinctions in the national vocabulary to enforce the sense of inferiority, these are all the helpmates of civil violence, spoken of, taken for granted as, the demiurge of normality.

From legitimated violence practiced against ourselves as a nation, it is not a big jump to *violence per se*, whether Newtown or the Boston Marathon, because of the rotted quality of the air we breathe: self-proclaimed “gun rights” as license for extreme individualism (mirroring the feeling of getting away with all that the traffic will bear, coupled with contempt for the law and the assertion of impunity whenever it conflicts with personal desires) sharing place with top-down authorization

of targeted assassination and the myriad evidences of merciless conduct in foreign adventures. This does not explain the acts of murder and violence in the cases named—individual culpability is the keystone of a moral-legal order—but it does help to understand broader social forces which assist in producing twisted minds and in even creating the structural ambience for such mental twisting to occur. What we’ve recently seen, and the countless instances of gun violence in America, would *not*, I believe, be possible in an equalitarian social order respectful of human dignity and pacific international relations, including the express disavowal of hegemonic intent; the stimulus would be lacking, as would the built-in aggressiveness of a people used to differentiating itself by race, social class, ideological justifications for their actions—presently, light years away from the polity as we know and live it.

MAY 1, 2013

### **The Albatross of Israel**

Appropriately, today is May Day, and in mid-Michigan a strikingly beautiful a.m., unusual for the dismal gray to which we have become accustomed of late, and moments ago, I awoke from sleep with a phrase recurring in mind, one that easily rolls off the tongue, yet that the two words of which I had never quite combined before: “military Judaism.” Why they should come to me upon awakening (I think all writers are aware that their thoughts are constantly gestating below the surface) I cannot explain, except that immediately I made the connection with May Day, a time for the celebration of radicalism and, at least in the past, taking some form of action—of which I, about to turn 80, am no longer capable—true to one’s beliefs and position in the social structure. I have never engaged in a diatribe against the State of Israel, nor intend to now. But May Day is also a time for *reflection*, and in this case my identity as a Jew and, as I see it, indeed am old enough to have lived it, what has happened to my people in America over my lifetime.

Growing up in the 1940s I was intensely proud of being Jewish. Partly, this was a simple yet I believe honest and correct attachment to America fighting a War Against Fascism, a patriotism unshakeable given the clarity of ideological issues and the known persecution of Jews in Europe. In addition, there was a personal factor—an illness that kept me bedridden for two years, which enormously raised my political consciousness, so that at age thirteen, and learning how to walk again, I not only quite naturally identified with FDR and his courage in surmounting polio, but I think more pertinent, somehow reaching out to militant unionism, the struggles against racial segregation, and yes, somewhat diluted, simplistic Marxism (perhaps showing off to my friends). The important point, though, is that Jews were in the *forefront* of radical causes in that period and earlier. Even more prosperous businessmen and lawyers had, and were not ashamed of expressing, sympathies for labor, opposition to racism, and a vision of One World.

That began to change rather quickly, in great part, I suspect, because of the intense climate of fear generated by McCarthyism and kindred social pathologies (for Joe could never have gotten started were not conditions ripe for political and ideological persecution in this country), and Jews, feeling vulnerable, were coming forward as superpatriots. The Cold War encased America in a patriotic bubble, probably its intended purpose, so that one saw the turning *rightward* clearly taking form in intellectual circles in the mid-1950s, from Daniel Bell and Seymour Lipset to Richard Hofstadter, an ersatz liberalism designed to cover over the retreat from the past of solidarity with

radical causes to, now, a denial, in the form of the Consensus Thesis, of protest in the American past. I'm ashamed to say that, just as in the case of the NeoCons of today, a disproportionate number of rightwing (disguised as socialist) intellectuals were members of the faith. I, of course, fought back, writing the first major critique of this trend, in a scholarly article on Hofstadter's *Age of Reform*, followed by other works. Yet my ties to Judaism, not necessarily as one who was observant, remained virtually absolute, to the extent of being blind to what we now can see as a form of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people with the formative stages in the establishment of Israel.

Still, in the late 1940s, I travelled in rare circles, shaking hands with Abba Eban at a fund-raising event, etc., and into the next decade admittedly taking pride in Israeli militarism as necessary and desirable in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Only very gradually did my perception of Israel change—far later than was the case of fellow radicals. I will not, in this May Day moment, elaborate further on the progression of my thinking during the intervening period, but rather turn to the present, and pose the question: Can one be Jewish (and by that I mean, proud of its radical heritage, conversant with and respectful of Torah, and therefore, comfortable with and not defensive over an identity as a Jew) *and at the same time* be unalterably opposed to the policies and actions of the State of Israel? I think, Yes. Obviously, the political-cultural-ideological scene argues the diametric opposite: one must be a staunch supporter of Israel or one is a self-hating Jew. Simple as that. And further, one must not only ignore Israeli atrocities, but also champion retrograde forces on the world scene—from US interventions on a global basis to assassination as an acceptable practice, whether Mossad or CIA.

I remain defiant when I say, not only can and *should* Judaism be disentangled from Israel in all things pertaining to its militarism and the persecution of others, but also, that Judaism as a noble religion cannot survive with the albatross of Israel around its neck—and the corresponding rightward turning of Jews in America. The best thing American Jews can do, and I say this for the sake of Israel, but a truly democratized Israel, and one that would be a blessing to Judaism, is to cut through the patriotic verbiage, the cant, the playing upon Holocaust memories, and unceremoniously condemn Israel where condemnation is warranted, starting with the victimization of the Palestinian people—but not stopping there, because at present Israel is the flash point of an explosive region, isolated largely from its own doing, for which its nuclear arsenal will not protect it and just may be provoke a world conflagration.

Earnestly, I wish to all a Happy May Day.

MAY 2, 2013

### **Obama's Transmogrification**

On May first, which we in the United States celebrate as Law Day, presumably to honor, at latest count, the principle and practice of indefinite detention, which includes torture, solitary confinement, and now, forced feeding, to pacify, break the will, and otherwise punish with impunity, detainees at Guantanamo, for many, going on a full decade, the *New York Times* in an editorial ever so gently criticized Obama for betraying (not their word) his promise to close the facility.

Whether prompted by the *other* May Day (completely unlikely), or the excellent national-security reporters Mazzetti, Savage, and Shane's investigations ranging from waterboarding to targeted assassination (also unlikely, given the disconnect between the editorial page and the live journalism), or simply, because the stench of illegality was so great that the *Times* had no other choice, provided of course Guantanamo was treated in isolation as a self-contained topic bearing not at all on the totality of Obama's militarism and grandiose vision of world supremacy (to be executed through covert operations and the extreme importance attached to paramilitary operations and advanced technologies of killing), it took a step to chide the president in the hope perhaps that no one was looking.

Yet Guantanamo is but a speck in the vast sea of America's international posture of counterrevolution. In its own right it is our Devil's Island, our Penal Colony, placing the United States in the fine historical company of the most nefarious imperialist powers. And Obama of course still sleeps well at night, confident that he is proving his mettle to the military establishment, defense contractors, hired guns, and finding increasing favor, the CIA and JSOC.

Guantanamo is, for him, merely a symbolic gesture of unrestrained American power, a veritable sideshow as the US prepares to take on the big boys, most notably China, as well as the brush fires which keep Americans on their toes, defense spending copiously rolling in, and the force-feeding of another kind, the steady diet of patriotism in the Homeland steeling our resolve for further interventions, assassinations, etc., North Korea, Venezuela, Iran, and still, Cuba, filling the bill. Counterrevolution and counterterrorism, dialectically entwined, becomes Obama's magic elixir at the foundation of the National Security State, the one creating the conditions for making the second operable and, to the American people, legitimate, the second, meanwhile, in its execution feeding the forces of the first—a vicious circle of hegemonic dynamism.

In the larger picture, Guantanamo is merely confirmatory. Already we see Obama's contempt for the law and the rule of law, the former in blatantly disregarding the constraints of international legal-moral conduct (targeted killing), the latter in just as blatantly cutting the rug from under civil liberties whether through surveillance, the denial of due process, or, as in the case of Bradley Manning (*our* Dreyfus), the use of Espionage Act prosecutions and egregious modes of punishment. A police state in the making?—probably not yet, *but* not for want of trying.

I referred to Obama as a pathetic despot because, as one meaning in Webster, he arouses this writer to contemptuous pity for his transparent (the only case of transparency in the Obama administration!) opportunism, absence of human concerns, gravitation to the sources of power in America: beyond the military, the world of banking especially, but all consolidations of megawealth, from pharmaceuticals to oil to health insurers, and the list daily grows.

CounterPunchers, Happy May Day even if my wishes are tardy, and the good old Bronx cheer for Law Day. My *New York Times* Comment (5/1/13) follows:

This issue of indefinite detention without benefit of trial and the rights accorded defendants in Western legal philosophy and practice, indeed, conversely, subject to “enhanced interrogation,” i.e., torture in its most reprehensible forms, is but one indication of the TRANSMOGRIFICATION of Pres. Obama, who is hardly recognizable from the candidate in '08, and presently a sinister force immersed totally in the ways of militarism in international policy, and friend to the wealthy and increasingly concentrated corporate-banking structure. Where has the American soul fled? How

accept barbaric policies unworthy of a free citizenry of a democratic nation? Yet, accept, we as a nation do.

Guantanamo is INSEPARABLE from armed drones for targeted assassination. They complement each other and spring from the same mindset, a sick psychopathological take on the human condition in which exercising strength with impunity becomes the New Ethics of the present age in America. Regrettably, the nation gives evidence of being past caring, mounting defensive mechanisms in the collective mind to prevent shame or the stirrings of conscience—defensiveness to go with its concrete embodiment in a megalithic structure of power disposed to unilateral actions, a DEFENSE of a status-quo world structure conducive to and consistent with American hegemony in a global system itself seeking to become multipolar and, hence, decentralized, as more in keeping with nations' peaceful existence and growth.

MAY 3, 2013

### **Obama and Birth Control**

Despotism does not require self-identity through the concentration camp (although offshore we have Guantanamo, and onshore, Bradley Manning); rather, it's the sometimes-overlooked seemingly little things, the added accretion of details, that are most telling in describing and experiencing a society's journey to authoritarianism. Modernized nuclear weapons, supercarriers, interventions, military bases worldwide—sure, the raw stuff of incipient now becoming actualized fascism, the big-boxed items such as these, is the real thing, but equally so are the tightening of reins in and around government, in plain words an absolute denial of transparency, in which our Commander in Chief and his courtiers in DOJ reach into the drugstore counter to ensure that Plan B One Step, deemed harmful to the nation's moral character by our science-loving POTUS, remains unavailable except through age restriction and placed out of sight.

Thanks, Mr. President, for your solicitude, custodian of the faith, which itself fortifies your moral will to murder women and children (indeed whomever, with “signature strikes,” happens to be milling around) in the Obama-Brennan crusade against terrorism, aptly carried out through armed drones for targeted assassination. That should be a tough pill for the American public to swallow, but now with a militarism-saturated atmosphere, you seem to be on your way. Not only government lockstep, but also *lockdown*, increasing pressure within and outside government to tow the line: an orthodoxy, and loyalty to the chief, which, as I say, is being implemented into the interstices of the body politic. In this case, first, Sec. Sebelius, of health and human services, overrules an FDA ruling on the availability of the morning after pill (not just here, Executive departments, DOJ, and POTUS make sure specific agencies—FDA, EPA, etc.—do not regulate in the people's interest and otherwise support measures of human welfare); then, with FDA making a slight retreat (to its credit), age restriction at 15 and stocked on display shelves (instead of under the counter), the pill's fate comes before the watchful eye, in April, of the US District Judge for the Eastern District of NY, who rules that it must be made available (i.e., no longer *politicized*) to all women with no age restrictions; and finally—as of now—the Obama-Holder Team immediately appeal the decision and even, by indirection thus far, repudiate the FDA compromise directive.

A stone wall worthy of the imperial potentate is under construction, who takes time away from executing a grandiose geopolitical strategy to contain—and perhaps if Dulles were alive,



“liberate”—China, so that it dutifully falls into line behind America’s wise guidance of the world structure. Obama is versatile, to say the least, making the world safe for American capitalism with one hand, and protecting the virginity of American girlhood with the other. I seldom have kind words these days for a *New York Times* editorial but here follows my Comment (May 3) to this one, in which I suggest that Obama has become the water-carrier for vested wealth and social ignorance:

The editorial is solid, but to understand Obama and his position one must go beyond “lack of access to safe contraception” and “unintended pregnancies,” to the underlying issue: POTUS, a slight feint to the center-left, in fact has betrayed his entire reform posture from the ’08 campaign. He has transmogrified into a charlatan figure consistently taking the retrograde side on ALL issues, including your concern, correctly, with global warming.

Science itself, under his head, has been narrowed to technological means of killing—the armed drones for targeted assassination. Similarly, the “modernization” of nuclear weapons translates into a greater lethality. Too, his overriding of EPA on acceptable ozone levels, and his equivocations on Keystone XL, speak volumes about his manipulative skills in the service of a rather dismal status quo.

Will this latest affront, not only to science, but also reason and progressive thought in general, we see him as he really is: a cunning watercarrier for vested wealth and social ignorance—both vital for bringing the American people to an accommodation to his presently first love: militarism, pure and simple. Obama’s DOJ in bringing this suit is the same DOJ denying habeas corpus rights to detainees, advocating for indefinite detention, and making mince meat of civil liberties, from Espionage Act prosecutions to rolling back limits on surveillance. Young women are merely the latest casualty in his assault on the American people.

MAY 7, 2013

### **The Double Bed of Business and Government**

Oh Mary Jo, we eagerly awaited your cleaning up of the stench, crud, *dreck* of SEC—all, and obviously, in vain, as your appointment to head the Commission once more reveals the Obama Administration’s mighty efforts on behalf of the American Business System, especially its most problematic, exploitative, illegal features, i.e., those which create the greatest unearned profits for the perpetrators of economic skullduggery and sleight-of-hand, now, as the latest attraction, derivatives trading. Obama has found his soul mate in regulation in Mary Jo White, just as in paramilitary operations in John O. Brennan. Government, at its finest hour of political treachery in serving the American people.

Let’s get serious. The United States throughout its historical development has interiorized the structure and values of capitalism, a puristic capitalist-institutional formation, still more greatly accelerated since the aftermath of World War II, to a far more intensified expression than any advanced industrial nation, thereby making America and capitalism itself synonomous, identical, indistinguishable one from the other—a synchronism of the two transcending party, and with thorough bipartisan support, creating clear *boundaries* to social change and political protest. Obama is merely the latest spear carrier in a continuous line—with few notable exceptions in the nation’s past—of presidents ministering to the needs of dominant groups and attempting, sometimes

unsuccessfully (witness the latest financial crisis and its still unfolding consequences), to satisfy the imperative needs of the economic system. Rather than seek, even within capitalism, the moderation of its war-prone, imperialist, underconsumptionist tendencies and societal class differentials, thereby adding some degree of justice and melioration to its execution and operations, America, now particularly under Obama, is going for broke to liberate its oppressive, even nightmarish, inner reason and potential, in which militarism, deregulation, and an economic freefall for working people become increasingly evident.

In this light, Mary Jo White at SEC, rather than a disappointment (for those who still hold out hope of Obama's essential honesty as dedicated to social welfare and structural democracy), is *par* for the course, one that started off with the appointments of Geithner, Summers, and Robert Rubin's policies, ideas, and confederates under Clinton, the placation of and support for Big Pharma and health insurers under Obamacare, the more pointed assistance to the defense, nuclear, and oil industries, and the heartfelt embrace of Wall Street, and continues in a sophisticated corporatism—the real definition of liberalism—far more dangerous for its realization of a social order founded on monopolism and wealth concentration than is the unsystematic business favoritism and chisling mindset, the penny ante mode of capitalist development, which fails to marshall the full resources of the State, of the Republicans.

Obama has a step up on his predecessors—for reasons still difficult to determine, given that his personal acumen and brightness have been grossly exaggerated. Perhaps he simply has allowed the gathering historical forces inhering in the US's global posture, in which America can no longer dictate the course of world events, to coalesce in his administration: an aggressive defensiveness against the very democratization his candidacy supposedly represented. Capitalism serves as the battering ram for the restoration of American world power. Its helpmate, more than previously, is naked force displayed as the doctrine of permanent war, the military juggernaut adjusted to the specific theaters of concern from naval power in the Pacific to drones for targeted killing, intervention, CIA activities of regime change, the JSOC paramilitary operations, springing up throughout the globe.

Interpenetration, the integrative, instead of merely parallel, structures, values, relations of mutual dependence and inspiration, of business *and* government, has in America since the time of Theodore Roosevelt (Gabriel Kolko's *Triumph of Conservatism*, after more than a half-century, still has not been assimilated into the collective realization that REFORM is largely big-business inspired, to achieve the consolidation of wealth and, relatedly, the security of capitalism at home and in the world, free from radical challenges, and even that of lesser-capitalist competitors), provided the foundations designed to ensure that capitalism in America, because inseparable from the State, could rely on government for its stabilization and global expansion. Now, under Obama, there is no longer any question (one muted or nonapplicable for long stretches of the past, frequently embodied in the strategy of the Open Door) that a mainspring of capitalism is the reliance on the military, for purposes of counterrevolution abroad, economic stimulation at home, and in both arenas, a system of power fusing national and international purpose to create Fortress Capitalism as an eternal source of wealth and leadership.

Welcome Mary Jo; do your mischief with respect to derivatives, themselves already mischievous enough, knowing that you will sleep soundly in the knowledge that, if your Boss can sleep soundly after personally selecting targets for assassination, you too deserve restful slumber for participating

in the wreckage of an economy whose victims are all but assassinated in their despair, loss of employment, and for some, foraging in the ash cans as in days of yore—under your counterpart servants of wealth.

Here follows my *New York Times* Comment (May 6) on its editorial disappointment on Ms. White's record as the newly-installed head of the SEC. My fond wish is that *Times* disappointment will turn into forthright and fundamental criticism of the whole shebang (but I'm not holding my breath):

The *Times*' analysis of SEC partiality to banks and their role in the derivatives trade is wise, sound, and timely, but lacking fuller context: Obama's wider posture of deregulation, exemplified by the appointment of White but actually running through the regulatory apparatus. SEC, FDA, EPA, in areas crucial to the welfare of the American public, we are being left to hang out to dry. The issue of derivatives cannot be treated in isolation: In all respects, internal corporate-banking hegemony defines the American scene, suitably disguised in liberal rhetoric.

When will the con game stop? Probably not for a long time, as both major parties contribute to the widening of economic and class differentials, accompanied by the weakening of the social safety net. Symbolically, derivatives signify the splitting apart of America—not the 1% vs. the 99%, too simplistic by far, but a structural cleavage sufficiently acute to result in underconsumption, unemployment, and the need to rectify domestic hardship through greater militarism, both as distraction and as the source of further enrichment for America's wealthy.

Yes, we are witnessing the financialization of the US economy, introducing basic distortions across the board, from loss of manufactures to further financial crises. As a nation, we seem not to learn, possibly even incapable of learning. But I'm glad *The Times* in this editorial helps to open the can of worms.

MAY 8, 2013

### **The New McCarthyism**

One does not have to be a right-wing nutcase to apprehend the dangers of government, a position staked out by Republicans and pseudoliberalists ("pseudo" because almost invariably concerned with taxation, rampant individualism, and laissez-faire business aggrandizement, rather than its originative creed, *the sacredness of the human person*) to push for unrestrained capitalist development, while the Left in America still regards, uncritically, government per se as the friend of the common people. Both evade the necessary critical awareness of the conditions shaping what government represents and its potentialities for advancing societal well-being. Let's forget here the Right; we know its nostrums ad nauseum: Get off my back; screw the next guy; wealth accumulation by fair means or foul, without government interference! It is the Left, or what passes for the Left, that concerns me here, Obama's assorted groupies and hero-worshippers, "liberals" and "progressives" who are satisfied by apparent victory on *cultural* issues (who wouldn't look good, in light of Republican/conservative positions on abortion, contraception, gay rights?) meanwhile overlooking war, assassination, widening differentials of class, income, and power, and the other fundamentals of a democratically-functioning society, from the state of the environment to the vigorous strengthening of civil rights and civil liberties, from the quality and character of education

to the bedrock institutional contributions to human dignity, such as in the case at hand a deep and abiding respect for privacy of the person.

Liberals and progressive passively watch, or quietly turn their collective head away, Obama's steady (I might add, compulsive) erosion if not outright abrogation of individual personal freedom, nominally in the name of the *National Security State*, but possibly on a deeper almost visceral level, an attraction to or predisposition for authoritarianism, taking operational effect in weakening or dismantling the rule of law, and, for him, perhaps more important, a genuine desire for submission to power-concentrates in society: the wealthy, the military, the presumed pillars of strength incarnated in class-differentiation and the bearers of domination. I am not playing Dr. Freud when I say this, because Obama's callousness toward the deaths he inflicts on others (via armed drones for targeted assassination) bespeaks a rigid line of defenses rendering him entirely predictable in the one-way effort to depersonalize the American people as part of and in the process of erecting a Tower of Strength, the structure of certitude which takes the form—the only form consistent with policy-trends running over at least a century—of American capitalism's claims to global supremacy through the implementation of a strong military.

This requires Obama's signature treatment of government, first, in order of construction, the absolute denial of transparency, which includes not only opaqueness in operations, but also a rejection of the people's right to know, as a principle of governance (hence, the vigorous use of the Espionage Act against whistle-blowers and those, like Bradley Manning, who wish to let light into the secretive chambers of military and diplomatic policy-making); and second, through the vast resources of the National-Security apparatus, directly extend the *tentacles* of government into the citizenry's mindset, ideas, thoughts, private dreams, stripping the individual bare before the Behemoth, to ensure total conformity or, more realistically, passivity, as the war machine and its partner-in-destiny capitalist accumulation at the top roll on.

Government could be the extension of the people, its inner standard and *modus vivendi* for society the democratization of power in all its attributes, and instead, under Obama, as himself the culmination of his predecessors' actions since the aftermath of the Second World War (provided one add his own qualitative twist, the uptake, through stealth, of militarism), the instrument of surveillance, wiretapping, sliding easily into thought-control—but to what end? *That* merits serious consideration, before it is too late. Charlie Savage of the *New York Times* (May 7) has written an important article on the expansion of wiretap capabilities as an administration priority still in the planning stage. My NYT Comment, on the White House moral vacuum, follows (May 8):

The phrase “wiretap capabilities” makes me shiver, although I'm not surprised in light of the Administration's dismal record on civil liberties. When will so-called liberals and progressives speak out at the rapid deterioration of the rule of law and the abuse of power inhering in surveillance, wiretapping, and other assaults on privacy? Obama has proven himself contemptuous of basic Constitutional tenets affecting freedom of thought and association—a self-evident reversion to McCarthyism as, now, the US under his leadership embarks on a new era of the Cold War, no longer directed to Russia, and instead, China, of course, but also Third World societies embarked on alternative strategies of modernization.

This expansion of “wiretap capabilities” is frankly dangerous, the more so because it emanates from a Democratic president whose policies are scented with liberal rhetoric. The White House

exists in a moral vacuum. That targeted assassination is fully entertained and practiced is at one with this phase of psychological-juridical control over the free expression of ideas. Both have reference to despotic ways of governance which have implications even beyond principles honoring privacy and free thought. Democracy itself is called into question.

MAY 10, 2013

### **Liberal Apologetics for Obama's Criminality**

As we know, Candidate Obama in '08 pledged to close Guantanamo; President Obama, now in his Second Term, *as we also know*, lied so egregiously, on a matter of extreme importance to the every meaning of the rule of law (because puking on Magna Charta and centuries of jurisprudential wisdom and morality by sanctioning and adopting the practice of indefinite detention—and all that follows, from denial of habeas corpus to affording the accused the right of counsel), that anything he says must be viewed with skepticism, if not worse. We have lived through some pretty horrible presidencies as measured by the standards of democratic government, liberal as well as conservative, which provides irrefutable proof of bipartisan injustice in American life, but Obama is something special, a summation of the worst of each, primarily because he has operated on such a fundamental level—from abrogation of civil liberties to global paramilitary operations—that so far has slid under the radar screen, largely through the silence of liberals and progressives. Republican obstructionism is welcome, because it allows him to pursue, through seemingly standing still, the reactionary alternatives to all policy issues (such as health care, social safety net reductions, favorable tax structures for the very wealthy, oil drilling as per usual, etc.) under the pretext that nothing can be done. Welcome, too, because the resulting paralysis in government ideally *prevents* genuine social welfare measures and democratization of class, income, and power in America.

There are no late or early, partial or full, affronts to democracy under his leadership, but rather the seamless web of continuity, a unified policy-context of Reaction, which, gaining personal confidence, especially by means of working closely with and gaining the soldierly regard and respect of, the whole national-security establishment (particularly the intelligence and Special Ops communities), Obama is actually growing steadily worse, more aggressive, more arrogant, more hubristic, with no end in sight. This sustained course, elements of which could be seen from the moment of taking office, as in faking health reform (to the delight of health insurers and Big Pharma), installing weak cabinet agency heads, compliant with and often championing the interests of those ostensibly to be regulated (Geithner and Salazar, Treasury and Interior, to say the obvious) and, of moment here, a combination of DOJ-NSC leadership, Holder and Brennan, useful in neutralizing the law itself in ensuring the militarization, done with impunity, of public policy at large, the armed drone transgressive of all legal restraints the perfect symbol of prevailing *despotic* practices. Whether Guantanamo, covert operations, assassination, wiretaps, surveillance, none stands alone, as the US embarks on a phase of counterrevolution made more urgent, and conducted more deftly—the liberalization of attempted hegemonic retention—than perhaps ever before, because of the changing nature of the world system.

America is no longer the center of the universe, and the more it tries to be such the greater its ultimate isolation and retrogression via the political-ideological-structural process of blowback. Obama is sitting on a powder keg of America's own making. Willful blindness to the social misery

and destruction caused others only hastens the decline in international power and stature. For now, the eyes of the world have focused on Guantanamo and drones as integrated aspects of *and* integral to the US framework of policy and power, while Americans persist in viewing them as discrete and of secondary importance (for some, of course, rather, both as being wisely pragmatic and highly satisfying, testifying to the nation's courage and superiority). Increasingly, however, not only the victims of US policy, but major nations classified as "friends and allies," are having sobering thoughts, on moral grounds and for fear of the precedents now created for rendering the world order a playground of destructive impulses.

Enter Harold Koh, Yale Law and former State Department councillor, whom the *New York Times* (May 8) reported now criticizes the Obama Administration for the drone-warfare program, which at State he had favored—and even to this day (hardly earning the *Times*'s encomiums) finds fault not with the program, including assassination, but with the lack of publicity and candor concerning its legal (?) rationale. Thus spake the modern liberal—substance is irrelevant, just gussy up the appearance. Here follows my *Times* Comment (May 9):

Harold Koh in his Oxford speech cannot undo the harm he has previously done by giving his name and reputation in support of the drone program. I should like to see F. Scott Fitzgerald's statement inscribed on his Yale School office door: There are no second chances. This is particularly true here, an equivocation, straddle, call it what one likes, which merely continues the practice of drones AND indefinite detention, the torture and denial of habeas corpus rights to detainees, that is Guantanamo, both inseparable—a permanent blight on America's civil-liberties record.

Koh wants clarification, not abolition, so that illegal practices can be dressed up as legitimate. Rather than outright condemnation of the Obama administration (which necessarily follows from the contempt it demonstrates for the rule of law), he wants to sprinkle flowers on the graves of the victims. Not good enough, by the standards of moral decency and first principles of jurisprudence. A Roberts Court may look on indulgently, but not, I think, the Warren Court and, in particular, Mr. Justice Brennan.

Guantanamo and drones are the forward edge to America's slide into authoritarianism under Obama (I try to speak in moderation and will avoid the f-word—fascism—for the present), because of the amoral barbarism which has brought them into existence, and because the American people sit passively by, if not in an attitude of complicity and/or condonation, at their very existence and continuation.

MAY 14, 2013

### **What Free Press?**

Breaking news of DOJ surveillance of the AP brought a welcome fighting back, a rare display of calling Obama on his running roughshod over civil liberties and here freedom of the press. The Holder-DOJ record so tarnishes the Constitution, all with Obama's knowledge and blessing, as to erase any real distinction between the two major parties weighing all things considered. What ever happened to Harvard Law, the descent into the gutter from the days of Pound, Cox, Griswold, now to Obama, one convinced he can act with impunity with his transgressions of the rule of law.

Lucky for him, the US is in a state of profound alienation, willingly acquiescent in anything or anyone who promises security from terrorism, as POTUS meanwhile has transformed counterterrorism into an agency of TERROR, at home through seeking the eradication of dissent, abroad, through the military-saturation of the globe with Special Ops, bases, assassination, doctrines of containment and hegemony (both directed at China), intervention (aka, regime change) in the internal affairs of nations the US does not like (Venezuela, for one, but others too), indeed, as Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo all testify, we are approaching the *nadir* of US foreign relations since Vietnam, and this under a Democratic president!

When will this criminal attack on international law stop? Probably not in the foreseeable future, as the Obama-Brennan team lays the groundwork for a condition of permanent war, as much to prevent the democratization of the class structure, by among other means the squeezing dry of the social safety net, as it is to achieve—already a work in progress—the militarization of US capitalism as a vain effort to remain on top in which unilateral dominance is no longer possible.

Obama will fail, at least on the second count, which in turn will adversely affect the domestic system, driving America further into the moral void of militarism as *the* national policy. What does DOJ's invasion of the AP have to do with the US's decline and growing belligerence? Everything, for when the agency of law enforcement acts the role of common criminal and invades the security of lawful activity, one instinctively knows that fascism is just around the corner. My Comment to the *Times* (May 14) on DOJ skullduggery follows:

Wake up, NYT. Your editorial page continues to give Obama praise because he somehow appears less repellent than the Republicans. Yet your investigative reporters, like Savage, Mazzetti, Shane, know better. AG Holder has been leading the assault on the Constitution since taking office—and Carney's claim of Obama's noninvolvement reeks with duplicity. How much evidence do you require that Obama tramples on the law, from denying (while still proclaiming) transparency to the questionable use of surveillance, the Espionage Act, and of course assassination as a tool of national policy.

Liberals and progressive fail to stand up to him. But I expect better of The Times. This is not a Left vs. Right issue, but simply one of freedom of the press. "Punch" is gone—does that give license to coddling those who suppress news-gathering? I wish you would come out fighting on PRINCIPLE, by exposing the abuses of POTUS and especially DOJ. For some time we have been in a new era of McCarthyism, but unlike the late 1940s when I and other resisted, the civil-rights community is silent as the tomb—the tomb in which we shall all be buried, if Obama-Holder have their way.

MAY 15, 2013

### **The Posterior of Fascism**

POTUS has been caught with his pants down, even if just this once and confined to government spying on the Associated Press. Only when its own ox is gored does the press, here the *New York Times* in a blistering editorial (May 14), fight back, yet still without touching on the real issue: Obama's fascistic tendencies, issuing as concrete policies and Executive legerdemain, both of which assisted by Brennan in ushering in the new militarism of paramilitary operations, along with

targeted assassination, and Holder in ushering in the new era of systematic deprivation of civil liberties and Constitutional rights. True, his predecessors were not innocent babes in some of these areas (although even they were not committed to assassination as a signature policy, nor, of course, so keen on employing the Espionage Act or creating Devil's Islands like Guantanamo), but the qualitative leap taken by Obama transforms now-familiar old-fashioned Imperialism and probusiness actions into a tightening of monopoly capitalism as assisted by military power in search of absolute arbitrariness in shaping the global structure and, not incidentally, silencing dissent at home. Once upon a time, government, while pretending regulation all the while defending business, nonetheless performed some useful service, including implementing the social safety net; now, under Obama, the National Security Agency trumps the Social Security Administration, the CIA and the JSOC trump practically everything in sight, and Treasury and the Fed ensure the financial sector carte blanche, foreclosures, unemployment, increasing poverty notwithstanding—the inversion of economic democracy made possible by the thorough corruption of political democracy.

The posterior of fascism—may I be blunt, buttocks (?)—has two cheeks, capitalism and militarism, as in a well-designed form completely dependent (once capitalism reaches a certain point) on each other for the necessary invigoration to keep the system functioning in a manner acceptable to its ruling groups. Obama is their guy, the personification of amoral, ruthless, secretive traits, well-protected by elaborate defense mechanisms to ensure a wall of arrogance against any and all criticism; not a dummy partner, but one who wants full collaboration with the bankers, Neocons, defense contractors, trade association mavens, oil executives, industrial polluters, hail fellows well met all, and countless others, sharing in common the vision of unrestrained capitalism in a risk-free world at home and abroad of conformity to their desires and ambitions. One place to start: *prevent the workings of a free press*. Hide the gathering of wealth and power into fewer and fewer hands, until too late when ruling groups cannot be dislodged short of revolution—the least likely outcome on the horizon of America, saturated as it is with the false consciousness of pride in capitalism (including whatever it takes, including a military budget strangling the lives of working people). My *New York Times* Comment (May 15) on the editorial follows:

The Obama-Holder regime does not want the “coverage of government,” secrecy now being at an all-time high, transparency, an all-time low. “Punch” (aka A.O.S.) would be PROUD of this editorial. Perhaps without realizing, The Times indeed exposes Obama’s rancid, puerile, deadly “integrity,” for abrogating Constitutional rights and denying civil liberties, in any regime, is always a tip-off to worse, in this case, stretching executive powers well beyond democratic limits—again, another tip-off, now the basic MILITARISM of POTUS and his administration, all connected to the construction of the National Security State.

I pray The Times finally recognizes the danger, and stops laboring under the lesser-of-two-evils arguments. Of course, the Republicans, in their infantile zeal only to obstruct, are beneath contempt—but that does not give license for praising Obama. He has much to answer for—your passing mention, prosecute those who reveal torture but never the torturers themselves, speaks volumes for the closed system of Reaction under his leadership.

For Obama, speaking truth to power is itself terrorism, and whistleblowers, the real terrorists. How much longer are these cryptofascist thugs to be allowed to act with impunity, whether on intervention, armed drones for targeted assassination, the “pivot” of military forces to the Pacific



(looking to square off against China), or many more abominations of thoughtful, democratic policymaking?

MAY 16, 2013

### **The National Security Blight**

A blight impairs or destroys something, here, the National-Security State, which Obama, his Administration, and personifying these trends of lawlessness and government violative of the US Constitution, the Department of Justice under Eric Holder, not merely impairs but is actively destroying the democratic civil-liberties guarantees of a *free society*. The Justice Department a vehicle of injustice reminds one of A. Mitchell Palmer and the Red Raids under Wilson, only now, under Obama, subversion (aka, terrorism) is defined in wider terms, as sedition, a crime against the State, whenever its own crimes are revealed by whistleblowers and made public. E.g., Bradley Manning is a terrorist by the Obama-Holder reckoning (*and AG Holder cannot use the lame excuse of refusal when he actively has prosecuted Espionage Act cases, specifically against whistleblowers*), because he made possible the divulgence, so that the public may know, of government practices, enshrouded in heavy layers of secrecy, that cannot stand the light of day—nor pass any meaningful democratic “smell” test.

Obama-Holder, Siamese twins when it comes to the deprivation of civil liberties (how many Court filings has DOJ entered to deny habeas corpus rights to detainees?!), like Obama-Brennan, Siamese twins when it comes to targeted assassination, as part of the planned continuity of the armed drone program as the prerequisite for binding future administrations to the acceptance of the doctrine of permanent war, to which Holder-DOJ contempt for civil liberties perfectly fits, points the way to station two or three on the slippery slope toward fascism in America. Holder’s appearance before House Judiciary yesterday (May 15) is a disgrace, as much for what he was allowed to get away with, as for what he said. And what he said bears scrutiny: “There should be a shield law with regard to the press’s ability to gather information and to disseminate it. The focus should be *on those people who break their oath and put the American people at risk*, not reporters who gather this information.” (Italics, mine)

With friends of a free press like that, what’s any longer to worry? Plenty. First, his gobbledygook in fact focuses on the whistleblower, here rendered an enemy of the State, AND made into a positive menace, the domestic terrorist in our midst whom we must resolutely squelch (think Bradley Manning, yet also a message of stern warning to all others of harsh treatment from the Government, at the least, solitary confinement and sleep deprivation while awaiting trial—somewhat beyond A. Mitchell Palmer’s Boys), all for what? For speaking truth to power—a power getting increasingly out of hand, and to which most liberals and progressives appear to have submitted to, and then praised because somehow less horrendous than what the other major party has on offer. And second, finally, Holder’s statement is at one with the phony retreat of the Administration, indeed, serves to introduce it, following the news of spying on the Associated Press. Specifically, Obama has called on Sen. Schumer to re-introduce his bill on the so-called protection of the press, so-called because this is a shabby attempt for the Administration to have its cake and eat it. Protection—to a point, on civil cases, less so, criminal cases, NONE WHATEVER on national-security cases. It is fitting Schumer should introduce this sham, for it illustrates the

integrated nature of national-security: a leading protector of Wall Street is also an enabler par excellence of American militarism.

Even the criticisms made of Obama, superficial in the extreme, today's *New York Times* piece by Peter Baker on how POTUS has temporarily lost his way and is chagrined by the obstacles thrown in the way of his noble plans (what plans? how noble?) as a case in point, fail to touch on the broad area of civil liberties. Yet the Constitution is fast going down the tubes as we, the nation, sit on our collective hands and cheer on the warmaking machine.

MAY 20, 2013

### **Lies, Betrayals, Obfuscation**

The People (imprisoned in their own fantasies, delusions, false consciousness) vs. Obama (skillful practitioner of deceit, war criminal) is no contest, given the political culture of acquiescence he has intensified and accelerated, through the pervasive atmosphere of counterterrorism on one hand, and worshipful gratitude to wealth-concentration and the structural hierarchy of power—founded on that wealth—on the other, on the shoulders of his predecessors, themselves adept at pushing the fortunes of advanced capitalism. A vicious circle, or perhaps dark hole out of which the public cannot climb, defines the present, with Obama the personification, the ideal leader, from the standpoint of ruling groups, in achieving the smooth integration of capitalism and militarism—the latter critical to the prevention of stagnation in the former. In today's *New York Times* editorial (May 19), practically beseeching POTUS to take action on the climate issue, rather than slamming down hard on his dismal, indeed, treacherous, record, one sees the problem: abject dependence on a policy-structure rooted in the performance and systemic requirements of capitalism, whatever the quality, character, or decisions of leadership, and the consequences to the United States and the world at large.

We are chained to, our destiny rides on, a system purposefully *degrading* and *inhumane* if it is even to exist at what are regarded as acceptable levels of profit, PROFIT itself being the overriding moral (?) norm. Outsourcing, why not, so long as our manufacturers can get away with it, and it does not stir up a ruckus? Intervention, why not, so long as the rewards are great, US hegemonic demands are met, and the geostrategic strategy of counterrevolution, to prevent challenges to capitalism as a world system, is advanced? Domestic scare tactics to foster conformity, and complicity in the machinery of war and regime change, why not, so long as class-and-wealth differentials are preserved, the militance of labor subdued, the consuming drive to stop LEAKS satisfied (lest they reveal grounds for world revulsion and a trip to the International Criminal Court at the Hague)?

There may have been a time, capitalism historically perhaps at midpoint, when the system could tolerate dissent, make room for civil liberties, and value pacific international trade as a stabilizing mode of commercial organization. No longer, at least as pertains to the US. Beginning with Theodore Roosevelt, when American capitalism, sector after sector, was rapidly consolidating (TR as trustbuster is among the most flagrant distortions of US history), monopolism was viewed as necessary and desirable, in its own right (prevention of putatively harmful internecine competition), and as the economic foundation for achieving military power, therefore implementing capitalist expansion in an increasingly hostile world.

Capitalism as a world system is productive of war. This, of course, was confirmed under Wilson and FDR, when rival imperialisms, disputing markets and territories, squared off against each other. The lesson was never lost on American policy makers (today especially, national-security advisers), except that its instructive legacy was not the search for peace through the renunciation of imperialism, but just the opposite, to gain uncontested global supremacy via military power and the creation of or influence on international organizations (e.g., IMF, World Bank) to be the extension of that power. In this light, Obama is merely an exaggerated distortion of the previous outlines of imperialism, adding targeted assassination and the strategic role of paramilitary operations to the witches' brew. Who needs a Kissinger when John Brennan has the president's ear? Who needs a Marshall or Bradley (not that I'm glorifying these generals, but in comparison), when Petraeus and McChrystal are on hand and the merry band of advisers convene off the Situation Room on Terror Tuesdays, plotting—yes, an accurate word—the death, without trial, counsel, evidence, of those held to be terrorists, regardless of civilian casualties (i.e., euphemistically termed “collateral damage”), and, for good measure, the deliberate targeting of funerals and first responders, as potentials collaborators of the victims.

Our president authorizes deaths by technological means thousands of miles away, *and we expect compassion from such a one*, or even to do his duty on climate change or promote the transparency of government at home or create a respectful attitude toward civil liberties? I wrote months ago in *CP* about the cusp of fascism—I fear we now have passed that turning point. My Comment on the *New York Times* editorial (May 19) dealing with Obama and the climate issue follows:

“...and no one doubts that he cares about it [the climate issue].” Is there any salutary position affecting a vital issue that Obama does care about? None. NYT misreads his record and intentions at every turn, climate change being an obvious case in point. Why persist with this delusion? Why grant heart and intelligence which, if only Republican obstruction did not exist, presumably would be resoundingly clear?

Face the reality, a deceitful president who would say anything to get elected and reelected, while supporting, by inaction as well as action, every vested interest working against the American people. Did he not even chastise his own EPA for raising the issue of ozone levels? Does he not have an Interior and Sec. Salazar compromising the beauty, fragility, and sustainment of the environment at every turn?

Policy-making has a core, in this case, deregulation, and a consistency, so that climate change fits the pattern applied by Obama to banking, market penetration, intervention, assassination, job creation, and much more—all to the disadvantage of the American people and world peace alike. His signature militarism, using up vast sums and resources, cannot be expected to be propitious ground for favoring, much less taking action on, climate change. Until the Times takes the measure of the person, its editorials, however well-intended, will prove ineffectual.

MAY 21, 2013

### **The National Mantlepiece**

Picture with me a vast luxurious hunting lodge, high-ceilinged, massive oak beams, bear and other trophy rugs, an inner sanctum of America's ruling groups, formally known as

“Interpenetration,” but more affectionately, to its members, “Co-Partnership,” to signify the bastion of joint-suzerainty of business and government, an integrated system, lately making room for the *military* as a part of the government, but in reality gaining increased autonomy as the agency synthesizing a more potent mode of organization: Advanced monopoly capitalism and the State. And in this impressive room stands a stone fireplace occupying much of the two-storey North wall, on top of which, the mantelpiece displays the plaques of achievement exhibited to reinforce the Members’ sense of honor and duty to the nation that has treated them with such deference, and among themselves, as stalwart citizens of wealth and property, that which provides the engine of innovation and progress.

Sorry, this edifice exists only in my mind, thought up this morning when reading an editorial and background item in the *New York Times* (May 20), about the derivatives market and the failure, STILL, to bring it under control—although as fiction goes, this has more truth than the reality which the White House, Congress, and the media zealously try to hide: an oligarchic-despotic framework dressed in the garb of democracy. Consider just on derivatives, a \$700T (yes, “T” for *trillion*) derivatives market, opaque, yet perhaps not as much as Obama’s War Councils, in which just five banks, each worthy of respect enough so that their CEOs should constitute the honor guard at the Super Bowl, control over 90% of all derivatives contracts.

Yes, you guessed right: JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley. They are the chief tenants and mortgage holders of my imaginary corporate retreat, but they are not snobs, even if their guests are primarily hedge fund operators and asset managers, for they freely, joyfully fraternize with industrialists (especially defense contractors) like GE and Boeing, construction companies, preferably Halliburton, and on occasion, admit the likes of the private contractors who supply mercenaries—all of these in addition to the special guests drawn from all sectors of the military brass and, *the crème de la crème*, the CIA and JSOC, quintessential units of the towering National Security State under Obama’s guiding hand.

Please come with me as we review the plaques signifying achievements in the Obama Era of Liberalized Fascism. Pride of place goes to the Merit of Constitutional Fulfillment, a plaque larger than the others because the achievements have been so great. Listed among other things is the itemization of the expansion of Executive Power, the plaque dwelling on how our beloved POTUS has surpassed Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II—no mean trick—in the commission of war crimes, the enlargement of the military establishment, the use of the Espionage Act both to reinforce opaqueness of government and enforce domestic conformity, and, negatively, pretend obstructionism, while working for deregulation and, internationally, so-called market freedom. With that record of accomplishment, one would think that no further plaques would be necessary.

But, after all, in my mythical Temple of Big Business joined at the hip to the State, one expects commendations for the remaking of America itself, which only this partnership could bring about, notably, perhaps the widest disparities of wealth and power in American history, the upper stratum gaining a far greater share of national income than previously (a new social arithmetic of *billionaire-ism*) accompanied, not coincidentally—and really deserving a separate plaque—, the steady disassembling of the social safety net. After all, cleaning the Lodge should be cost-effective: no unionization, a low minimum wage, the expected deference from inferiors.

I fear that one such cleaning operation is now in progress, so I'll only mention in passing other plaques of distinction, testifying to Obama's virtues: one for Guantanamo, awarded by Judges at The Hague and, in special session, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee; another, for the greatly expanded use of the armed drone for targeted assassination, assassination the proudly accepted improvement in modern warfare; and on capitalism's side, the outsourcing of manufacturing operations as the adroit means of improving profit margins, while bestowing the blessings of America on our Third World neighbors and friends. The "satanic mills" of 19<sup>th</sup> century England have now been replicated by the philanthropy of 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

There is still room on the mantelpiece to celebrate more mergers, further monopolization, more billionaires, and, not to be forgotten, global military and paramilitary operations for promoting American hegemony.

MAY 23, 2013

### **Drones = Assassinations = War Crimes**

Journalist Scott Shane, with an assist from Mark Mazzetti, reports in the New York Times (May 22) on the decline in armed drone strikes. Perhaps, for all the wrong reasons, drone warfare is now under review—i.e., in the words of one national-security expert, these strikes are not worth the "long-term strategic costs." Giving up this principal tool, Obama's signature weapon of choice, is not on the table, only its selective use, so as not to invite charges that the US is horrifically guilty under international law for the vaporization of fellow human beings, and then, from "pilots" sitting in Nevada or New Mexico, 8000 miles away, the victims of presidential authorization at nomination parties Terror Tuesdays at the White House.

Who, in Summer '08, would believe they were electing a moral monster, so cold-blooded as to revamp military operations through expanding the mission of CIA, assigning critical tasks to JSOC, and globalizing their paramilitary functions into both a doctrine of permanent war (the gist of counterterrorism) and avenue to maintaining political-ideological hegemony (the gist of counterrevolution) in a world that no longer corresponds to US claims of leadership in structuring the international system on lines acceptable to American capitalist expansion and, its twin, US military supremacy.

Obama is expected to reveal the justification for wholesale acts of political murder (now including that of four Americans—but who's counting?) and the extreme terrorization of whole populations, through never knowing when the sustained buzzing overhead will strike without warning, this last a trick that the Nazis learned about psychological warfare during the London bombings, especially the unmanned aerial vehicles. If the US is skating on the thin edge of fascism in its creation of an hierarchical social order based on monopolization, the unrestrained growth of the military, and, through the political culture of militarism ensuring mass passivity and acquiescence (hardly a peep from organized labor, civil rights and civil liberties organizations, religious groups, students—all of whom played an important part in the civil rights struggle—on assassination as official US policy from the top), the use of armed drones is taking America over the edge.

Now partly disguised through liberal rhetoric and the stubborn loyalty to Obama of the Democratic party, the black community (an expression of racial solidarity Paul Robeson and Dr. King would have had no trouble seeing through), and assorted liberal groups, beginning with labor and environmentalists.

“Fascism” stick in the craw? Too bad, because given the preponderance of military spending, planning, and execution, coupled with the uncontested fact of wider disparities of wealth and power in America as never before, and the formation looks suspiciously one-sided, a business polity occupying a moral void, presided over by a POTUS responsive to ruling groups, at the direct expense of the poor, yes, black and white alike.

Obama’s fascination, joined by Brennan, and a national-security apparatus claiming drone assassination is moral because it obviates the need for more boots on the ground (Pentagon jargon), with antiseptic killing—down of course to leaving the victim a blood spat, disappeared, not one to worry about in terms of imprisonment—speaks volumes about the psychological authoritarianism callous to human suffering, not to say obliteration. The Oval Office has done its share in legitimating bestiality.

My Comment on The Times’s article follows:

Along with Savage, Shane and Mazzetti are among my favorite national-security reporters. Yet in this article I could not find the key word describing the armed drone strikes: ASSASSINATION. No wonder America’s ugly reputation in the world. Obama the assassination president, Obama enshrouding the program in secrecy (lest its illegality be exposed), Obama the killer of more children through so-called “collateral damage” than are killed through gun violence in America.

Oh those Terror Tuesday sessions off the Situation Room, selecting targets as though in a shooting gallery at a county fair. POTUS the Mars of War (while God is busy ministering to the victims). Almost as shameful as Obama’s personal authorization for targeted killings—these include zapping the funerals of the victims and first responders seeking to help the victims—are the reasons given for slowing down the number of strikes. Everything about the drones speaks to cynicism, cold-bloodedness, amorality, together adding up to an indictment for WAR CRIMES.

MAY 24, 2013

### **Benghazi: Imperialist Outpost**

I am not naïve. Embassies have been centers of intrigue, propaganda disseminators, bases for political intervention in a nation’s internal affairs, intermediaries for the promotion of markets and investments, etc., practices not confined to those representing the US, and hardly confined to recent times. That said, *Benghazi* (technically, a consulate), signifies, as so much else under the Obama Administration, a qualitative departure from the customary. Lines are becoming blurred in the table of organization—the State Department, CIA, Pentagon, White House—all, with some rubbing of elbows, have been pressed in the service of imperialism, less cohesive than POTUS would like, but sufficiently unified as to make US embassies active weapons, stalking horses, outposts (whichever

you prefer) in establishing, solidifying, and focusing the power of America's presence in a global geopolitical strategy of military-economic-ideological dominance, loathe, on Obama's watch, to be relinquished as the world structure itself is in process of decentralizing. The US is engaged in a Sisyphean struggle as it slides from the post-World War II state of unilateral hegemonic, into a multipolar context of China's ascendance, Third World emerging industrialization, and postcolonial mass aspirations.

So much the need for Benghazi everywhere (along with the vast network of military bases) if America is to remain top dog, or at least think of itself that way—until its fantasies are overtaken by reality, at which time even the militarization of diplomacy can be expected to give way to naked displays of power as such. We're almost there. There is something psychopathological about the current political debate on Benghazi, in which both major parties are squaring off against each other, as *meanwhile* neither one questions the desirability, profitability, and wisdom of imperialism, that which embassies are intended to serve. And designed to serve: the more unwanted the American presence in a country, the greater the concrete (as though giant bunkers), the greater the military protection, the hulk announcing and embodying US influence, right down to exempting private contractors (think Blackwater under its new corporate name) for crimes committed against the laws of the penetrated—in some cases, occupied—country. In the last three days, an article in the *Washington Post* (May 21) by Scott Wilson and Karen DeYoung and the *New York Times* editorial (May 23) make clear that Benghazi is but a pawn not only in US domestic politics, but also in spreading America's emphasis on paramilitary operations worldwide, beyond what other presidents contemplated, and at one with the program of armed drones for targeted assassination. Embassies are beachheads for more forward maneuvers, both political and military.

Benghazi was primarily a CIA installation, its "annex" given the cloak of diplomatic immunity. The *Post* article details the way David Petraeus, then DCIA, did everything possible to protect the Agency, such as drafting the so-called talking points used by Susan Rice (the present tempest-in-a-teapot fueling inter-party rage) while obfuscating its interventionist mission, while the *Times* editorial rightly pointed to CIA's primacy within the consulate, in both cases, although the larger question is not addressed, nailing down that these facilities are often fronts for a range of covert activities. Politely put—given the role of operatives and mercenaries running loose, itself reason enough for the anger expressed by the crowds, which then turned to violence. That larger question, still an untouchable (just as drone assassination is untouchable), involves, not cost-benefit analysis, or what others may think of us, or even, the danger of setting precedents which might come home to haunt us, but *the intrinsic morality of domination*, in its manifold forms, military, economic, political, cultural, ideological, all of which are aided by the Benghazis numbering in the tens if not hundreds.

My Comment on the *New York Times* editorial, which deserves commendation for its implicit criticisms of the CIA, its presence there, its role in managing the news, follows:

"Reforms are under way," states the editorial, except the one reform which merits frank discussion: Why these embassies in the first place, because, far from representing traditional diplomatic functions and concerns, they have proven to be the forward edge of US hegemonic intent, such as the massive hulk in Baghdad, or in this case, a CIA outpost? The locals know the score and deeply resent the armed fortresses spread globally, the claims of diplomatic immunity

when personnel or the protectors (often private contractors, aka, mercenaries) violate the laws of the country when committing crimes, such as the clearing of intersections when passing through.

Embassies have become instruments of war and/or social control, and, not surprisingly, elicit hostile feelings and attacks. Renounce imperialistic policies, demonstrate good will, keep CIA and related forces out, and I doubt there would be attacks. Nothing is any longer normal, given the total politicization of the American presence in foreign lands.

MAY 27, 2013

### **Obama's Militarism-Imperialism Lite**

A tissue of lies? No, the whole Kleenex box-one tissue interleaved with all the others. Obama is fortunate to be presiding over a country steeped in false consciousness on essentials (war, sacrifice of the social safety net for the glories of militarism, and what psychoanalysts once called—T.W. Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, 1950—authoritarian submission, a political-cultural disposition to strong leadership reinforced by appeals to patriotism and pressures toward conformity), as opposed to the major-parties' bickering about how best to strengthen US imperialism. His May 23<sup>rd</sup> Address therefore fell on receptive national ears, a desperate will to believe that immorality is moral, illegality, legal, and war, the *necessary* defense of Homeland in its centuries'-old quest for peace, honor, the rule of law.

How comforting! Liberals and progressives especially have taken heart in POTUS's rhetoric that a new day in American foreign policy is dawning—has already dawned, by the simple fact of self-declaration that the United States (Exceptionalism, as usual) is always bound by the constraints of the rule of law and, here, international law. We wrote the book, and cannot possibly do wrong; selfless in serving first as the example, and then, the guardian, in bringing justice to the world. All else is enemy propaganda. With *that* as background (and a solid phalanx of flags as his backdrop) Obama spoke with becoming assurance—to me, arrogance—as the leader of the Enlightened World in its struggle against the forces of ignorance, darkness, covetousness, wholly oblivious to America's moral sense and good intentions.

Such a masterful speech (as judged by the *New York Times* and mainstream media opinion) deserves a closer look—but not too close, lest the luster wear off. Kudos to his stable of speechwriters, at least one in a high national-security position, for not even Obama on his own could reach the heights of personal humility and historical awareness found here, the latter, e.g., at the start, when he says, “For over two centuries, the United States has been bound together by founding documents that defined *who we are as Americans* [italics mine, a recurrent phrase of morally-presumed self-congratulation as a nation], and served as our compass through every type of change.” The constancy of Constitutional guarantees and principles, such as—each with my implicit question mark behind it—due process of law, transparency in government, and the divulged reasoning for going to war. Armed drones for targeted assassination alone suggests the “founding documents” have been lost. Yet Obama persists. Through thick and thin (“we know that a price must be paid for freedom”), he provides the feel-good promise, that of ultimate victory—victory, each time, in the sequential process of further wars (the Obama-Brennan doctrine of permanent war): “But our commitment to Constitutional principles has weathered every war, and every war has come to an end.”



Then early on, he immediately swings into the theme of a halcyon period murderously shattered by the most sinister forces imaginable (far worse than Joe McCarthy conjured up with heathenish Communism): “With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, *a new dawn of democracy* took hold abroad, and a decade of peace and prosperity arrived at home. For a moment, it seemed the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be a tranquil time. Then, on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, *we were shaken out of complacency*. Thousands were taken from us, as clouds of fire, metal and ash descended upon a sun-filled morning. *This was a different kind of war*. No armies came to our shores, and our military was not the principal target. *Instead, a group of terrorists came to kill as many civilians as they could.*” (Italics, mine) The die is cast, war is justifiable, a just war, against an implacable enemy, must be fought.

Who could resist such persuasiveness? Except of course someone who wishes to do harm to America, gradually enlarged to include domestic critics of Administration policy in the conduct of the war, thence expanded to dissidents of every stripe—although no action against them need be taken *for now*, given their relative scarcity and harmlessness—the climate of fear generated by means of counterterrorism being enough to bring the people into line. And so, Obama could step forward smartly, a unified (cowed?) citizenry behind him, eager to hear of their own and the nation’s moral virtue. America “strengthened our defenses—hardening targets, tightening transportation security, and giving law enforcement new tools to prevent terror.” We may have overstepped (here, the proper humility, although his frank admissions never lead to, and still do not, a change of course, making them more a political tactic than the soul-searching of which, given the record of assassinations, he is manifestly incapable): “Most of these changes were sound. Some caused inconvenience. But some, like expanded surveillance, raised difficult questions about the balance we strike between our interests in security and our values of privacy. And in some cases, I believe we compromised our basic values—by using torture to interrogate our enemies, and detaining individuals in a way that ran counter to the rule of law.”

The very abuses for which Obama must be held accountable, yet, now stated, to be pushed aside in the prosecution of the supposedly just war (Brennan in particular gave currency to the just-war position in the inner circle—anything goes being its succinct definition, in light of the hellish nature of the enemy). So, notwithstanding “expanded surveillance,” etc., it is time for boastfulness, laying the basis for the new-new departure, following those herein taken: “After I took office, we stepped up the war against al Qaeda, but also sought to change its course. We relentlessly targeted al Qaeda’s leadership. We ended the war in Iraq, and brought nearly 150,000 troops home. We pursued new strategies in Afghanistan, and increased our training of Afghan forces. We unequivocally banned torture, affirmed our commitment to civilian courts, worked to align our policies with the rule of law, and expanded our consultations with Congress.” This last sentence requires the whole box of Kleenex, multiple tissues (of lies), even consultations with Congress so one-sided as to make the relevant committees seem like beggars at the gates.

Indeed, it requireschutzpah to declare: Our alliances are strong, and so is our standing in the world.” Which is why we need vast concrete fortresses (aka, embassies) staffed by CIA operatives and private contractors, and the increased use—the new-new in process of formation and deployment—of Special Ops and paramilitary forces in general, all because we are so loved and admired in the world. Obama must be standing in a parallel universe, to believe in the US’s “standing in the world.” Then, his little tick or rhetorical giveaway—“Now make no mistake”—

which is designed to make us perk up our ears and, in gratitude, hunker down for the message from on high: Despite routing al Qaeda and killing bin Laden, and making America “safer because of our efforts,” he continues in admonitory voice, “our nation is still threatened by terrorists.” That warning drives the last nail in the coffin for any hope the US will alter its conduct in the world, break the vicious cycle of a perpetual-war mindset, awaken to the jurisprudential requirements of respect for law, international as well as national; terrorism becomes the Communist Menace of yore, in presumably flowing robes, out of instinctive recognition that American capitalism both thrives on “enemies,” and cannot do without them, to ensure its uncritical acceptance (and its freedom to act with impunity, however abusive) at home, and also thrives on the seemingly economic benefits of a permanent-war mode of stimulation (even though, as now, productive of unemployment and underconsumption, compared with directing the social *surplus* inward and an equitable distribution of wealth).

At times one feels the identity of the “enemies” is immaterial, just that they be there to keep the people in line, and the dominant structure of power intact. In this regard, Obama is helpful, his speech tossing in all manner of terrorists, from the Right, from the Left, from the individual run amuck—it doesn’t matter, just let America always be on guard. For America to operate as it has, as it wants, as it strives to continue, with hegemonic “responsibilities” always in view, and a domestic class system which preserves the prerogatives and powers of wealth, terrorism must hang like a thick pall over the mental landscape. Otherwise, we may see what our Leaders, Generals, Bankers, Industrialists, and others fortunate to join the ranks of the ruling elite, are doing, and often doing in our name—transparency be damned.

To hang on Obama’s every word, in the hope that he understands the misery, privation, and death he has caused, or to be charitable, that has occurred on his watch for which he must be held accountable and himself take personal responsibility, merely creates a secondary level of meaning bearing no direct relation to reality, or worse, carries one down the dank public-relations tunnels of the White House and Democratic spinmeisters, in neither case giving one confidence he means what he says. Thus, discussing the difficulties of mounting military operations against reputed terrorists, in which the consequences of “putting U.S. boots on the ground may trigger a major international crisis,” incidentally, nice enough of him to notice (!), Obama nevertheless can turn, in order to avoid the potential “backlash,” to what he euphemistically terms “remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones,” as the most humane, cost-effective way of killing (they’re too hard to capture) the enemy: “*Simply put, these strikes have saved lives.*” (Italics mine; I couldn’t resist, given the profound cynicism)

It gets better (or worse?), a defiant shout of legitimation, still withholding the legal memos which rationalize the state of war—in this case, explicitly, our friend “the just war,” which may not require further explanation, given the memo-writer comes not from the Office of Legal Counsel but Heaven itself: “Moreover, America’s actions are legal. We were attacked on 9/11. Within a week, Congress overwhelmingly authorized the use of force. Under domestic law, and international law, the United States is at war with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces. We are at war with an organization that right now would kill as many Americans as they could if we did not stop them first. *So this is a just war—a war waged proportionately, in last resort, and in self-defense.*” (Italics, mine) It is as though total annihilation awaits, if we do not act at once and decisively. And those “associated forces,” for there will always be more, given the logic of the hit-list (the “nomination”

process, in which POTUS personally has the last word, on Terror Tuesdays at the White House), validates the idea of permanent war.

Cynicism is joined by slickness, a not-known combination in Obama's repertory. First, "And yet as our fight enters a new phase, America's legitimate claim of self-defense cannot be the end of the discussion." Self-declared "legitimate" in advance, what occurs as part of the supposed discussion next is not surprising. Obama pretends restraint at the very moment that he, and from all available accounts working closely with Brennan, carefully lays the basis for binding later administrations to follow the very tactics, rules, and procedures that he has worked out—including of course drone warfare, assassination, and paramilitary operations. In the speech, this is disguised by a mea culpa (again, swiftly washed down the drain) and then the distortion of the content of the counterterrorism planning: "To say a military tactic is legal, or even effective, is not to say it is wise or moral in every instance. For the same human progress that gives us the technology to strike half a world away also demands the discipline to constrain that power—or risk abusing it. That's why, over the last four years, my Administration has worked vigorously to establish a framework that governs the use of force against terrorists—insisting upon clear guidelines, oversight and accountability that is now codified in Presidential Policy Guidance that I signed yesterday."

This is quite a mouthful, deception at its keenest: a) the tactic, for sake of argument, *assassination*, which IS drone warfare and Obama's signature weapon-system, now presumed legal, may not be wise or moral "in every instance," perhaps only in the preponderance of cases—hardly dictating that it be abandoned; b) Obama's admiration for high-tech weaponry, its antiseptic quality, which attracts him, not least because dispensing with boots on the ground, reveals an utter lack of affect when dealing with killing, given the strike is "half a world away," *and* somehow because technology is associated in his mind with progress, makes the tactic itself commendable (as for abuse, the record is clear about so-called collateral damage and targeting funerals and first responders); and c) establishing "a framework governing the use of force against terrorists" sidesteps the question of its content and intended binding quality, the PPG signed after so many years, if the Administration runs true to form, probably never to be made public or else heavily censored *for national-security reasons*.

I invite the hardy soul to weigh in further, before giving cause for celebration that POTUS has connected with the American people, advocates and works diligently for peace, and believes in social justice, the rule of law, and the demilitarization of American capitalism and the nation's political culture.

MAY 29, 2013

### **Obama's Traducement of Democracy**

Watching the French Open, I recalled the famous question years back about tennis, my substitution of "jihad" a timely update designed to insinuate a subversive thought into the mindset of the superpatriot in the White House, whose Memorial Day address, following upon The Speech of the Century, hit a new high (low?) in patriotic propaganda (that not even W., with or without an aircraft carrier for backdrop, would have uttered) in which he lamented that not enough Americans had gone to war (*he should talk?*) and therefore failed to appreciate the beauties of heroism and sacrifice, a condition probably due to the all-volunteer army: how much better if all served—

implicitly, a universal, peacetime draft for the future wars he allegedly has ruled out. Obama is a menace—to truth, peace, domestic rectification of poverty, suffering, clarity of social priorities. Hence, my call to jihad, not the Islamist-fundamentalist-violent form but, as my ancient Webster's Ninth New Collegiate provides, as one definition, "a crusade for a principle or belief." My kind of jihad would be *secular, nonviolent, geared to basic political-economic-ideological change, antimilitaristic, and a global posture of nonintervention and renunciation of hegemony, whether through military, economic, or other means.*

There. Jihad wouldn't be so bad, simply the Left as I had known it personally, say, 1945-60, before the slow degradation of societal decency and humane political consciousness set in, thus, today, somewhat unrecognizable as a platform for action. Certainly, insofar as the Democratic Party is concerned, and has been for some time, perhaps—with few notable exceptions—going back as far as 1945, the ending of the New Deal and postwar anti-Communist hysteria. This has been a one-party nation for some time, especially in foreign policy, so that today's lame excuse by Obama (and the millions still supporting him) that Republican intransigence prevents pushing ahead with genuine democratization of the social order is obviously the bunk—phony, not least because (a) no alternative has been put forth, and (b) Obama, staying with the present, but Bill Clinton, the pride of *deregulation*, and he are interchangeable in their love for banking, extreme wealth, and fostering business-military integration on both the economic and foreign-policy fronts, has bent over backward to facilitate wealth concentration and the formation of a still tighter ruling class. In a word, patriotism—the universal chorus—has found its soul mate in mature, expansive monopoly capitalism, each needing the other to enforce complicity and acquiescence for the whole shebang of aggressive efforts to stay on top of the world structure of power and international system of economy, while, in the massive transfer of wealth upward in America, keeping powerless and poor large numbers of its citizens (the attack on the social safety net by *both* elements of the one-party state) as the ideal condition to ensure docility and gratitude from below.

My sort of jihad must start with an awareness that things are rotten, not in the state of Denmark, but in the U.S. of A., rotten from the standpoint of the loss of moral consciousness (how else explain the bland acceptance of assassination as a cornerstone of American foreign policy?), and the further, related, loss of economic bearing, as witness the widest differential in wealth and power in American history, itself partly attributable to the financialization of the economy's yielding enormous riches to criminal activity of those involved at the pinnacle, from bankers and hedge fund operators to asset managers and the regulators who countenance, naybless, the accumulation process. But add to financialization, now the recent structural grafting on the capitalist base, a militarization which, perhaps deliberately, drains away social resources which might otherwise be turned to the benefit of the whole nation. In this light, the last thing wanted is a capitalism responsive to human needs, a formation theoretically possible when it has been democratically organized (so that socialism need not be the summum bonum of economic-social organization, although still my preference) but anathema to ruling groups whose capitalism must be hierarchically arranged, class-stratified in all but name (the fiction of a gigantic "middle class" being most useful to the stimulation and maintenance of false consciousness), and definitely war-oriented in disposition—in sum, pretty much where we are at present.

If my emphasis on awareness appears to eviscerate the idea of jihad, I could of course suggest the kinds of demonstrations, with requisite intensity, we as a nation were privileged to have in our

past, from the 1877 railroad strikes to the Sit-Down Strikes of the late-1930s to the magnificent Civil Rights Protest much of which prior to the 1960s remains to be uncovered, through Mississippi Freedom Summer and community organizers (for Obama, a *resume* item) to the hundreds of antiwar actions in communities large and small nationwide. Awareness must not be an excuse for inaction, but a catalyst for disciplined involvement wherever the military and corporate America rear their ugly heads. Submissiveness is only a cut above slavery, or the concentration camp. Obama's frigidity toward human tragedy (Ben Rhodes probably has to put words in his mouth when he makes the rounds of those tormented by violence and natural disaster) is exactly the right measure for eruption into more surveillance, more prosecution of leaks, more denigration of civil liberties—McCarthyism with a jauntiness coming before the rostrum.

Jihad is an intriguing notion, because it is throwing back in the face of the Opportunists, the War-Mongers, the, to recur to the despised of World War Two, Profiteers, still with us, except in name, the very term used to scare us, accustom us to wariness about criticism (Espionage Act used against whistle-blowers), sending a pall of dark smoke over the landscape of moral conscience, so that hit lists, Terror Tuesdays, collateral damage, enhanced interrogation, indefinite detention—all of which are far worse to a democratic society than what is being conjured up for public consumption to legitimize a permanent-war culture of politics—have come to define, to use Obama's favorite slogan, for him, to opposite effect, *who we are as a people*. A not very flattering portrait.

MAY 30, 2013

### **A Jurisprudential Cesspool**

When someone steals something, in this case a precious object, we call him a thief (to put it mildly), but when what has been stolen, and *that* by the highest officials of government and law, we can and should call them despots, for what has been stolen, most obviously, has been freedom of the press, and behind that, more important, freedom of speech, thought, organization, expression of a free people in all of its forms living in a democracy. "Despot" is too good for those who deny freedom in the name of freedom, *and deny the rule of law in the name of the law*. That is presently where we're at, several baby steps away from peering directly into the abyss—a Police State under the fiction of protecting us, the people, from ourselves. The Fetishism of Leaks, to Holder, DOJ, Obama, the internal subversion gnawing away at liberty (liberty for whom?), complements, and is a necessity in the good fight of counterterrorism against our enemies apparently without limit, and therefore justifying a permanent-war doctrine and state of readiness.

Counterterrorism requires the authoritative, highly publicized, heavy-handed search for and prosecution of leaks—real and imaginary—to legitimize everything our government has become, trend lines starting in the aftermath of World War II, bipartisan and integral to maintaining unilateral superpower status, if possible: a unitary historical process of counterrevolution to secure a globalized American capitalism, free from competing military-economic-ideological challenges, whether socialist and even alternative-capitalist modes. Dissent is not wanted at home, impedances to absolute hegemony abroad. Obama steps into a moving stream, but rather than divert it to reflect societal democratization, as his liberal-progressive mass followers claim (themselves unmindful of their own rightward shift and complacent burial of radicalism), accelerates its flow by removing any

obstructions in its path (the elixir of market fundamentalism, deregulation, valued assistance to upper groups, and, his special contribution to the emerging structure of mature capitalism, its consolidation and monopolization, a systemic integration with militarism, witnessed in everything from staggering military budgets and modernization of the nuclear arsenal (now with attention to the weaponry deployed throughout Europe), to his trade-mark, targeted assassination.

Is punishment of so-called leakers surprising given this framework? Does assassination conduce to respect for the law on other occasions? Does “hit-lists,” an established fact of Terror Tuesdays as the National-Security gang sits around, at the Chief’s feet, planning summary executions from the skies, where habeas corpus, right to counsel, evidentiary preparation, are as remote as the 8,000-mile in distance from “pilot” of the drones to the victims, executed, *vaporized*, in plain sight. The Obama Team is one set of tough cookies, not to be restrained by reporters, whistle blowers, soon perhaps, even demonstrators, as we saw when one *CP* writer, Medea Benjamin, was ejected from Brennan’s hearings for DCIA. But now finally we are seeing some action in response to (a) abuses of the law, (b) the utter lack of government transparency, and (c) the chilling effect (a natural outcome of Obama’s own coldness with respect to civil liberties, as much else) on press freedom and the right to know in general, action, be it noted, taken by Republicans—not Democrats—and therefore easily dismissible by liberals, even when, as here, there is abundant merit in the criticism directed against government tactics in seeking to silence dissent and opposition.

Let’s look at the latest, the still developing story on DOJ’s subpoena for obtaining the calling logs of AP reporters to their phone lines, a subpoena that did not provide advance notice to AP (which might have enabled them to contest its issuance in court), obviously a slimy tactic. Whether the Republicans on the House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, Investigations, were motivated by partisanship, because the target of the investigation was James Rosen of Fox News, their letter, signed by Robert Goodlatte and James Sensenbrenner (the latter especially, not ordinarily one of my favorites), to AG Holder had in my judgment excellent arguments of a wider nature that could be applied to the Bradley Manning case and all who expose the secrecy and practice of overclassification of documents by government to shield itself from criticism of illegal acts—in foreign policy, categorized as war crimes. Here Holder comes off badly. Not least, we learn from the AP revelations, as a way of churning up the cesspool, that the search warrant for the e-mails of James Rosen occurred in May 2010, quite far back—with probably others unreported—in Obama/Holder’s tenure. *And* the search warrant application came with the request that the court issue a non-disclosure order on Rosen (i.e., that the warrant not be disclosed), on the grounds that such disclosure “would endanger the life and safety of an individual, flight from prosecution, intimidation of potential witnesses, or otherwise seriously jeopardize the investigation.”

Hogwash, showing the Feds play hardball—secrecy to the nth power; yes, Rosen, but a formula, the non-disclosure order, that could be used against anyone, castrated into silence as Holder, DOJ, and Obama go about the management of the news. But here, in the Goodlatte-Sensenbrenner letter, Holder is asked piercing questions about procedures, the clear implication being the unrestrained witch-hunting directed to the news media, and his own role in the search warrant application. Because the search warrant referred to Rosen as a “co-conspirator,” he was therefore subject to prosecution under the Espionage Act—which these Republicans protested, while sadly, John Conyers, the outspoken liberal on Judiciary, covered for Holder, stating the investigation was

troubling but not actionable. What followed was the inevitable damage control, Holder offering to meet *off the record* with press representatives—he still defends secrecy as a way of life—presumably to tighten investigative standards, which the *New York Times*, but not the *Washington Post*, had the grace to refuse to attend, standing firm for public disclosure.

I suggest that 18 USC section 793d be spread across the entrance of the Department of Justice, or else stitched on Obama's presidential attire—the frightening, and to me, evil, Espionage Act, which has for its purpose intimidation pure and simple, whenever government and its leaders are guilty of criminal activities and these crimes are threatened with exposure. Secrecy and lack of transparency have no other purpose in a free society. Kudos to Paul Gottinger, whose CP article, “Obama Hands Out the Hemlock,” May 30, assesses the significance of administration secrecy. My *New York Times* Comment on the article discussing Holder and the Subcommittee's Concerns (May 30) follows:

AG Holder and DOJ are currently our #1 enemy of press freedom and civil liberties in general, an out-of-hand menace that qualifies both by any common-sense definition to be home-grown TERRORISTS. Holder, always with Obama guarding his back, had trampled on habeas corpus rights affecting detainees; worse perhaps, he is responsible, along with his Boss, for employing the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, more than the combined total of Obama's predecessors.

It's time to clean the Augean stables. Holder is a disgrace to the rule of law. And Obama, given his signature weapon, armed drones for targeted assassination, clearly stands in violation of international law—possessing, no doubt, spurious legitimation from the Office of Legal Counsel and Holder. Why the extreme SECRECY which characterizes the administration, unless of course for fear that policies and practices would be disclosed showing Obama to be a war criminal?

Good riddance to lawbreakers who cloak themselves in the mantle of the law. The shame here is that only Republicans—and for their own partisan reasons—seem concerned about press freedom. Where can the people turn for honest, disinterested government?

JUNE 3, 2013

### **The Irony of Iraq**

Wars, particularly when wholly unjustified (though usually disguised as just wars), frequently, as now, have strange outcomes, often to the detriment of the power that inflicted the misery and destruction in the first place. The presumably conquered, strangely enough, store up the memories of their suffering, and cannot wait for returning the favor (even if in less virulent form). The *New York Times* has an article (June 3) on China's investments in, active management of, technical expertise provided for, and even the supply of labor to a substantial portion of the Iraqi oil industry, with benefits accruing both to Iraq's own government and the Chinese national companies.

Exxon-Mobil move aside, or, given the precedent set, accept lower profit margins (or agree to a Chinese partnership), all anathema to the oil giants and their sponsors back home—the Obama administration and US military—not to say the shareholders. And this is not unique to Iraq, although here the stakes are high, from the standpoint of both parties, the Iraqi government's much-

needed funds in the country's rebuilding process (no longer pushed around by oil-company depredations) and China's increasing and vital need for a sustained energy supply.

Indeed, as the article points out, China is not in this for profit, and willingly takes a lower profit margin than Western companies would accept (the latter fighting back, to little avail, by negotiating favorable deals with the Kurds, only to make the Iraqi government more determined in its "tight-fisted" policy), meanwhile making a far more favorable impression through Arabic-speaking executives, highly trained personnel, in short, running circles around, albeit as capitalists, the capitalists of the US and the West, used to having their own way, on their own terms, suitably backed by *force* or the threat of its use.

Why is this important? It provides confirmation that America can no longer act with impunity, mount interventions where- and whenever it pleases, expect its OIL and other companies to have completely free access to the world's wealth, and further expect to get away with its previous conduct and record. China is a force to reckon with, and its success in more pacific, skilled forms of capitalist penetration—such as building soccer fields in West Africa (a small, yet indicative, detail of a different approach to international economics, far less productive of war)—poses a definite threat to US global interests, making the US the chief sponsor of military-backed commercial expansion in the world. What this implies for running up against the tides of history, and inviting retaliation as America tries more desperately to stay on top, does not bode well for US safety and security—largely a state of affairs it has brought on itself.

The more the world moves away from us, the more the Obamas and Brennans, our presumed guardians, come forward with their schemes of nuclear modernization (the B16-12), armed drones for targeted assassination, reliance on Special Ops to wage global paramilitary operations...and the list of destructive means of warfare continues ad infinitum. How many more countries the US devastates (as in the case of Iraq) will subsequently turn on us—*tune in, the story is not over*. My Comment on The *Times's* article follows:

US militarism (i.e., the entire political and defense establishments) must be in hand-wringing mode and gnashing of teeth. This is PAYBACK time for all the deaths and injuries we caused in an immoral, unnecessary war. To boot, China is proving more sophisticated, energetic, and intelligent in its capitalistic side than the US, bogged down in a plundering mode with no understanding of local cultures and certainly no humility.

As one who strongly opposes US unilateral global hegemony (partly for America's own sake, the way it has distorted the distribution of wealth and power, moral values, not least, the social safety net, in US society), this news of China's gains in Iraq is most welcome. It also explains why Obama's "pivot," the geopolitical Pacific-first strategy which is aimed at the encirclement and containment of China, a policy that will never work, and instead justify further astronomical defense spending and the dangers of further confrontation.

Welcome, America, to the new multipolar world power structure, one which no longer tolerates bullies and crybabies (the US rolled into one), a global system in which the US, rather than China, or say Brazil and the Third World emerging industrial economies, is on the losing end and becoming increasingly isolated. Militarism and capitalism had always been a good fit, indeed, necessary to one another. The formula is now outmoded, as mixed economies, eschewing forcible penetration, are taking over.



JUNE 5, 2013

### Obama's Reverse Cuckoldry

We've been taken so badly, it becomes impossible to admit our stupidity and false consciousness. In Webster's the cuckold has an unfaithful wife; in America, it *is* the unfaithful husband, the arrogant, deceiving, secretive president who has violated the marriage vows (aka social covenant) between the government and the citizenry which characterizes the political formula of democracy, notably, a relation founded on trust, in which the leadership seeks to promote the general welfare as its highest priority, NOT drain the nation's resources in order both to finance a huge military establishment designed to further permanent war and counterrevolution *and*, in direct proportion, so weaken the body politic, through the extreme maldistribution of wealth and power, as well as, its corollary, the drastic erosion of the social safety net, therefore rendering democracy a pitiable caricature of what it should represent. Obama has metaphorically slept around quite a lot, starting perhaps with the banking community and the financial industry at large, which itself suggests his awareness that the financialization of American capitalism was the coming wave of, and would come to define, its advanced/mature monopolistic form, to which he would add two essentials for further growth and concentrated wealth-accumulation: de- and nonregulation (the market-fundamentalist paradigm of a trickle-down framework), and, to me his signal blandishment to attract further illicit couplings, militarism in its gradually expanding form—from camp followers (aka defense contractors, and now, private suppliers of mercenaries) to the geostrategic pivot to paramilitary operations, assigning greater roles to the CIA and JSOC as a way of keeping terrorism front and center at all times.

Why militarism subjoined to capitalism? And is it, or under Obama is it now integral to capitalism, as vital to staving off America's decline as the unilateral dominative force in world politics and economics? That decline is now underway, hence the desperation in acting, as in making targeted assassination via drone warfare *primus inter pares* in our current arsenal of lethality (nuclear weapons still too ghoulish to set the agenda for the Terror Tuesday hit-list confabulations). The militarization of capitalism is well-underway, as if to say US capitalism has hit a stone wall in its desire for unrestrained security in the face of alternative paths to modernization—not only emerging Third World industrialization, but, Obama's self-defined nemesis, of course, China. Indeed, it is hard to see anything Obama has done which is not without reference to capitalism, including a foreign policy which has used counterterrorism to isolate and encircle China (as in attempting the transformation of South Asia into an American protectorate, from the Afghan War to military alliances and joint exercises with our "friends and allies" in the region) in order to weaken the US's chief rival, and to ensure that other areas of the world remain free for natural-resources exploitation, low-cost, highly profitable outsourcing of industrial activity, and, not to be forgotten, kept politically and ideologically safe as insurance against anticapitalist social movements and political economies.

This general appraisal (we are now into his *fifth* year) could be continued with an enumeration of his other paramours, the pharmaceutical industry, nuclear power, aircraft, OIL (Interior is setting records on leasing agreements on public lands), automotive, but what captures my eye here is the duplicity which surrounds nuclear weaponry, and the *B61 warhead* in particular, especially given his speech professing a commitment to peace. Armed drones, supercarriers, long-range bombers, atomic subs, littoral craft, all fine and dandy, from the standpoint of conventional Cold War

reasoning, although advanced weapons-technology, which he has zealously recommended, has added more sinister toys for the Chief to play with. Somehow, though, *now is different*. Obama has discovered the world of annihilation—or at least its threat, should America not have its way. And from what is currently happening, he seems to like what he sees! Let me proceed step-by-step, first going back one week, to the *New York Times* editorial, aptly titled “Throwing Money at Nukes,” (May 26), which alerts one to the danger of Obama’s actions in this critical area. We are discussing the real thing, militarily, and not—as bad as that is—a drone strike with civilian casualties (of which the record is abundantly spread, negating any blather about peace that Ben Rhodes and his other speech writers have provided). Then, I would like to review the specific project, the upgrading of the B61 into the B61-12, drawn from a report of the Federation of American Scientists, authored by Hans M. Kristensen. Finally, my Comment to the *Times* editorial.

The editorial has valuable information not widely known to the public—even though, as I shall note in my Comment, the *Times* still temporizes with respect to Obama’s overall record, essentially coming to him on bended knee and pleading with him—the ever-present “should”—to do the right thing. It begins by pointing out the provocative nature of upgrading these weapons: The US “has about 180 B61 gravity nuclear bombs based in Europe. They are the detritus of the cold war, tactical weapons deployed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey to protect NATO allies from the once-feared Soviet advantage in conventional arms. But the cold war is long over, and no American military commander can conceive of them ever being used. Even so....” Here Obama and the obvious provocation: “Even so, President Obama has put \$537 million in his 2014 budget proposal to upgrade these bombs. When all is said and done, experts say, the cost of the rebuilding program *is expected to total around \$10 billion*—\$4 billion more than an earlier projection—and yield an estimated 400 weapons, fitted with new guided tail kits so that they are more reliable and accurate than the current ones.” (Italics, mine) That, of course, is quite a sum for “the detritus of the cold war,” unless the *debris*, now in process of modernization, can be made suitable for further military use, as in a new Cold War, or the very least, a permanent European installation of American power having global implications for enlisting NATO support in US interventions and a warning to Europe itself about possible movements to the Left.

Nowhere is there a sign of withdrawal of these weapons from Europe. The *Times* sees the rebuilding program to be “a nonsensical decision” in light of Obama’s Prague speech in 2009 and strategy review the following year, in which he “advocated the long-term goal of a world without nuclear arms and promised to reduce America’s reliance on them.” It added, significantly: “He also promised not to field a new and improved warhead.” The contradiction is palpable, I would say, even irrefutable, save that it may not be a contradiction at all, if by that we mean, a logical incongruity, for Obama may be guilty of the deliberate misleading of the American people, and thus not a contradiction but a downright lie, to mask what is a singular posture of militarism fully intended from the start. Too, the *Times* is suspicious about New Start negotiations, but here and earlier missed the point that reductions were meaningless so long as lethality of the available stock was increased. In any case, the point it makes is well taken: “But the B61 upgrade would significantly increase American tactical nuclear capability and send the wrong signal while Mr. Obama is trying to draw Russia into a new round of nuclear reduction talks that are supposedly aimed at cutting tactical, as well as strategic, arsenals.”

Moreover, “nonsensical” in more ways than one: “Even if there is a case to be made for keeping the bombs in Europe as a sign of America’s political commitment to NATO (*allied opinion is divided on whether the weapons should stay*), many experts doubt that the B61 warheads need to be rebuilt now, if at all. Government-financed nuclear labs have a rigorous program for testing them to make sure they still work.” (Italics, mine) One has reason to believe that Obama wants the lethality, the upgrade, and the intimidatory world power they represent, and that this is a conscious decision, given, as the editorial points out, that his request for the upgrade itself in 2014 “is 45.5 percent higher than the 2013 figure,” and that his request for \$7.86 billion “for all weapons-related activity in the National Nuclear Security Administration, a semi-independent agency within the Department of Energy that oversees the nuclear warhead programs, is 9 percent above the amount Congress appropriated in 2012.” The *Times*, to its credit, notes in passing that, meanwhile, “Congress slashes spending on far more defensible programs like food stamps and Head Start,” but drops the matter there. It does mention, however, that besides “overspending on warheads,” Obama—the one-two punch—“has cut the Global Threat Reduction Initiative program ,” which protects “vulnerable nuclear material at sites worldwide, by 15 percent from 2013 levels.” It lamely concludes: “His budget is being rewritten by Congress, but in the nuclear area it is a disappointing, and befuddling, measure of his priorities.” Why *befuddling*, when in reality there is nothing perplexing about his priorities? Obama, militarism, assassination, hegemony, all stirred up in a witches’ brew of US-defined globalization, to the glee—and benefit—of America’s dominant groups and the seeming confirmation of its ideology.

The *Times* is late on the scene (yet it still renders a public service here, in light of Americans’ low state of awareness about military planning and execution), for in July 2012 Kristensen’s Federation of American Scientists (FAS) blog, superbly titled “NNSA’s Gold-Plated Nuclear Bomb Project,” referring to the National Nuclear Security Administration, accompanied by the drawing of the proverbial cowboy, hat in hand, riding the B61-12, with the legend below, “Escalating cost estimates for the B61 Life-Extension Program threaten to make the new B61-12 bomb *the most expensive ever*,” already presents the living lie to Obama’s protestations of peace (Italics, mine). Few people listened, although decidedly late in the game, especially when one takes account of Obama’s total foreign and military policies, where nuclear weaponry fits nicely as ultimate back-up for the sustained course of maintaining the global system of bases, constant intervention, covert operations, strident counterterrorism and with it, surveillance and the abrogation of civil liberties, and his now almost-daily tributes to the military. But the B61 has been kept under the radar (similarly, the details of drone assassination), likely an unnecessary caution given the relative absence of Left criticism of Obama.

One enters the arcane world of Congressional-Pentagon antechambers and dark corridors as though the script were written by Kafka himself, as one navigates the B61 narrative. Thus, Kristensen begins, “The disclosure during yesterday’s Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing [i.e., July 25, 2012] that the cost of the B61 Life Extension Program (LEP) is significantly greater than even the most recent cost overruns calls into question the ability” of the NNSA “to manage the program and should call into question the B61 LEP itself.” There follows figures before the Committee on astronomical cost increases (not even including “a new guided tail kit assembly,” itself having “recently increased by 50 percent,” as well as “the cost of equipping the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter with the capability to carry the new weapons,” again a sizable increase, on and on into the night of nuclear doubletalk, with different bombs consolidated into a single design and a

recitation of “enormous budget overruns” Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos, and Oak Ridge, all indicating “NNSA’s abysmal record of underestimating costs of nuclear weapons programs.” Unemployment, mortgage foreclosures, sacrifices everywhere up and down the line, and the spending on advanced nuclear weapons goes on—and the dance of death continues.

The social safety net cannot compete with the likes of the military planners, national-security “experts,” Obama himself and his distorted view of priorities. Washington is Rome at its dissipated best, crumbling into the ruins of militaristic aggrandizement—my voice, not Kristensen—but he does not mince words about the madhouse-atmosphere in which military spending goes largely unchecked: “Apart from poor planning, the B61 LEP cost escalation is probably also fueled by planners that appear to be drunk on promises of increased nuclear funding and political commitments to nuclear modernization. The result is an overly ambitious program that instead of doing basic life-extension of existing designs is trying to add exotic features and components to the weapon that was originally tested. And the planned B61-12 is not even the most ambitious version the planners had asked for (they were not allowed to add multi-point safety and optical firing sets), which would have been even more expensive.”

Obama’s fascination with high-tech gadgetry, as in the “antiseptic” killing of those on the hit-list, from 8,000 miles away, undoubtedly plays a part in attracting him to the intricacies of nuclear modernization, a cultural fact of life this fascination of killing with impunity that the author of the report seems not to reject entirely, just *which* nuclear weapons are most efficacious and cost-effective: “Whatever the best way forward, the U.S. should phase out its remaining non-strategic nuclear weapons, delay and redesign the B61 LEP, and focus its resources on maintaining the strategic nuclear weapons and conventional forces that are actually needed for U.S. and allied security in the foreseeable future.” In a preceding sentence he presents a vision which Obama the facilitator and/or enabler is helping to bring to fruition: “The B61 LEP is not the only or necessarily most complex LEP in LEP on the horizon. NNSA and DOD are already planning the W78 LEP and envision building a ‘common’ warhead that can be used on both ICBMs and SLBMs. Such a warhead is not currently in the stockpile.” I can’t wait, and am confident that Obama will come through with this latest gem, perhaps even displacing from his mind the exquisite paradigm of targeted killing.

JUNE 7, 2013

### **Obama’s Crown Jewels**

Would you buy a used car from this man? If the maker happens to be Constitution Motors, model “Rule of Law,” with accessories including habeas-corpus rights, right of counsel, speedy trial, then, after kicking the tires, you might want to apply the Guantanamo Test, in which case, you find the doctrine of indefinite detention, solitary confinement, and, while languishing, perhaps a might of torture, sleep deprivation, brain washing—all in all, *that’s* one car, given the wear and tear, the deceptive warranty, the recklessness of the owner, one would want to stay away from, and begin looking for a more honest value. On the same lot, a sleek beauty from Drone Motors, already armed as part of the original equipment, and handled with great care, the driver somehow sitting 8,000 miles away, a car having one, and only one, purpose—to *kill*, and therefore listed by Consumers Report as a good buy, if that were the new owner’s purpose. Our shopper, however, has a mild

distaste for that sort of thing, having already been disappointed in the previous maker's "Rule of Law," concerned, no doubt, about the low resale value when, what is hoped for a vehicle, it contributes to a sense of well-being for the owner and his family. But now, on to the third, from Surveillance Motors, practically invisible, as though a mirage, a car, unlike any in automotive history, produced without advertising, all known test results classified by the management, and, in truth, so shoddy as to violate every law in the book (except those laws, such as FISA, designed to protect it and give it the air of legality) and therefore appealing solely to criminal types.

This last model, especially its twotone coupe, aptly named the Nondisclosure Provision, can be counted on to turn heads (or, metaphorically, of course, chop them off, leaving no untoward trace), and is all the rage among government procurement officers. It comes equipped with the latest in gadgetry to ensure an entertainment center designed to please the most discriminating taste, with universal access to every conceivable channel known to human communication. Tune in (only competitors dare call this "spying") to private conversations, and, if lucky, pillow talk, globally, thereby enriching one's sense of humanity at the same time knowing the FISA Court gives you full legal right to eavesdrop. The coupe improves on all earlier models, such as the McCarthyism, still a collector's item, because it conjures up a threat called terrorism that is far more sinister, menacing, and widespread than Communism, only to lash it to pieces by the help of the new service centers, known as CIA and JSOC, and with the approval of the firm's CEO, in not-so-extreme cases, an ongoing marketing campaign of paramilitary operations, including licensing assassination, while, with bigger fish to fry, a strategy of confrontation (e.g., the "pivot" or Pacific-first strategy to contain and isolate China) calling for the massive deployment of naval and air power into the new territory to be opened. Nondisclosure, at your dealers now, with a careful warranty that balances domestic thought-and-social control with the promise that the benign company has only its customers' interests at heart, is currently the product of press revelations, ones hinting that this, along with the other models, beckons all to a glorious future in the National-Security (aka Surveillance) State.

Not surprisingly, these automotive offerings are designed to be sold, primarily, to the power hungry, who have only contempt for the law, as they speed from one intervention to another, attracted to the models' rakish design, fusing militarism and domestic repression (as in the two-tonedness of the coupe), and its extravagant price tag, in this case, up to \$100B for nuclear modernization, missile defense systems, and retrofitted aircraft to carry the weapons, and even larger amounts for wars, occupations, worldwide bases, mercenaries, and the usual accoutrements for national security. We should thrill to, and take pride in, the humongous sums, coming directly out of domestic needs (thus instilling in the citizenry—customers all—noble sentiments of austerity and self-sacrifice), approaching if not exceeding \$1T (as in trillion). As used cars, they carry the pedigrees of previous use, as in Vietnam and research and development in regime change, tested from Cuba and Chile (notably successful, with Pinochet, the new executive on board to all three companies) to Iran and other testing grounds, should rival companies (aka alternative modes of development and/or challenges to US financial and business hegemony) try to spring up.

Fortunately, forces of authoritarianism, possessing majority ownership in all three, have found their joint supersalesman, who converts counterterrorism into counterrevolution and the clear makings of a domestic Police State, in short, a free market for their products—lawlessness, assassination, and spying on the customer base—proudly decked out in liberal/progressive dress,

snake-oil charm (to some), and a record of networking which takes him into the inner circles of Wall Street, the CIA, and the “defense” industries. And why not, for he promises them global markets, political-military hegemony, and blood-letting sufficient to satisfy the most psychopathic drivers on the road. His name may be familiar, Obama, but his record has been skillfully falsified to cover up the very results these models were intended to achieve, and to which the customer base turns a blind eye: a consistent policy framework promotive of inequality, social deprivation, and massive wealth-accumulation to the stockholders. With scare-tactics abounding, such that wrecking the Constitution, reducing America’s “enemies” to blood spats or specks of dust, and mounting a campaign to dismantle safeguards to, and perhaps the idea of, *privacy*, all publicised and sold as essential to The Protection of the Homeland, one can look forward to the breaking of new sales records, equally shared, harbinging a new era, which is nicely put as: liberal humanitarian fascism.

I include below my four Comments to the *New York Times* (June 5-8) in response to revelations about government programs of surveillance, each self-explanatory—and consecutively written— for those familiar with the paper’s themes and coverage on this significant issue. Their importance to me is as germinating soil for ideas which then find a place, as now, in the article. More than addenda, they contain a specificity of criticism from which further elaboration and the fleshing out of implications become possible. At this writing, Obama is meeting with the Chinese president to discuss cyberwarfare, as meanwhile he actively conducts cyberware against the American people. The fourth Comment in this series is fuller than NYT’s space limitations allow:

## I

The Times finally stirs, after blindly supporting Obama these many years. Consider your heritage: A.O.S. [Arthur O. Sulzberger] and publication of The Pentagon Papers. Yet you still compartment the issues, making civil liberties merely one area, instead of seeing it as integrated with the whole of public policy.

Obama is a menace to freedom. Period. What you protest against here has its immediate parallels in the doctrine and practice of indefinite detention, denial of habeas corpus to detainees, the very gruesome act of targeted assassination (a self-evident war crime), and yet you fiddle while America burns, by upholding the fiction that because Republicans are so bad Obama must therefore be good.

Stand up for press freedom (as by and large you do), but also stand up for freedom that extends further: the right to have transparent government, rule of law punctiliously observed, effective regulation, a vital social safety net, and protection of the environment—NONE of which the Obama administration has done.

## II

Expressions of outrage are simply not enough. We should have seen this coming, even from the early months of the First Term. Obama is a danger to civil liberties. He shows contempt for the Constitution from numerous angles, perhaps beginning with unctuous remarks about transparency, and then proceeding to throw a mantle of secrecy around government like not seen before in peacetime. Overclassification of documents is a deliberate attempt to cover up illegal and criminal activity which cannot stand the light of day. Indeed, Obama’s obsession with secrecy reveals an unstable, desperate personality, fearful not only of discovery of real and potential war crimes, but

also of self-discovery, that beneath the “cool” exterior is one unduly attracted to power, to the point of being unscrupulous both in gathering and using it.

Hiding behind legislation is a shabby pretext for surveillance because Congress is itself complicit in constitutional violations. The very fact of refusing to make public the legal memos presumably validates the kinds of surveillance now uncovered, a refusal also about targeted assassination, which gives Obama no leg to stand on—and today’s denials should be taken for what they are: damage control, obfuscation, worse, deceit. How can America tolerate a POTUS whose preference lies in assassination? Liberals and progressives—the sad state of radicalism in America—enjoy being walked over, lied to, betrayed at every turn, and then come back for more.

### III

Laws are not necessarily lawful. Using FISA and/or hiding behind nondisclosure and other secretive procedures mocks the rule of law itself. Obama has soiled the Constitution he was sworn to uphold. This is worse than McCarthyism because more sweeping in intent and possessing the technological means for conducting surveillance.

Civil liberties is a paramount issue of democracy—failure there makes one wary of failure on other fronts, including US interventions, massive military expenditures, regulatory lacunae, wide differentials in wealth and power, and yes, Guantanamo, Espionage Act prosecutions, etc., which although pertinent to civil liberties also strike a more disturbing note: the fascistic tendencies of the administration.

### IV

This gets worse by the minute. “Domestic spying activity,” far worse than Watergate, and, given its scope the actors involved, NSA, DOJ, and yes, POTUS (all, despite careful attempts to squirm out of accountability), should send massive waves of indignation through society—*yet has not*. Why? In fact, the DOJ April court filing, on expanding the scope of these activities, and nailing down the no-disclosure provision, while conveniently leaving Obama and Holder unmentioned, should be a warning of the looming threat to American liberties. The recent IRS affair is a tempest in a teapot compared with what Obama-Holder-NSA-DOJ-FBI-CIA have shown to be overt neofascist actions, tendencies, and tactics.

Kudos to The Times for defending press freedoms. But you still do not confront, and probably never shall confront, Obama *head-on*, or, despite your justified concern, Congress itself, which willingly turns a blind eye to illegalities, even war crimes, as in targeted assassination, commissioned and/or committed by the Obama administration. For when you refer to “limit[ing] the collection of call records and the monitoring of Internet traffic to that of people suspected of terrorism,” you fall right back into the trap Obama-Holder has set for you: that of being stampeded by cries of national security and protecting the Homeland against terrorist attacks. Therefore, silence; just as Congress has also maintained silence—the only difference being Congress tacitly approves, by a bipartisan majority, the need for knuckling under to administration pressure and your editorial cautiously—too cautiously—does not. How long until the “people suspected of terrorism” includes Obama’s critics, or critics of assassination, or critics of B61-12, or critics of secrecy and nondisclosure rules?

Time is running out. As a principal defender of press freedom, The Times should take off the editorial gloves, stop its obeisance to the lesser-of-two evils mindset, and expose Obama, *in every realm of public policy*, for betraying the principles that got him elected.

JUNE 13, 2013

### **America at the Precipice**

CP writers Sperber and Kampmark, among others, superbly discuss legal-moral-political implications, respectively, of the revelations of Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden in their exposure of US government war crimes (Manning) and domestic spying on a comprehensive scale (Snowden) and, especially, where this leaves us a nation presumably under the rule of law. Let me add: No other country in the world presently stands out so nakedly—the Manning-Snowden symbolism—in clamping down hard on internal dissent, on erecting *secrecy* into a principle of the state (now capitalized in practice as the State, the National Security State), on developing the legal arguments and provisions which legitimate the suspension of the Constitution *in the name of the law*. Supplementary baggage doesn't help: the Patriot Act, Guantanamo, targeted assassinations, illegal, unwarranted intervention, all of these, now under Obama, as the continuance and intensification of the work of his predecessors, for which he must therefore take full responsibility (even more so, since the previous contours of policy were well-known, and he willingly followed suit), places the US in the unenviable position of representing a society almost alone, by its action, in combining domestic repression and foreign aggression, becoming the more integrated the further each is pursued, in order to cover up the other.

Manning-Snowden should be viewed as a unitary political-structural phenomenon, inseparable from the direction America is taking (a) as an historical process of the militarization and financialization of American capitalism, (b) necessitating that in this mature stage (of impending decline) drastic steps be taken to maintain what before had been unilateral dominance in economic and political affairs, and (c) among these is suffocating internal dissent for a course of permanent war and the violation of international law.

Manning and Snowden obviously speak truth to power, and less obviously, rip away the façade of liberal democracy to reveal the hard core of punitive authoritarianism in the service of a concentrated system of economic power, a corporatist ethos of respect for hierarchical arrangements of class and wealth, and deference to a political authority itself beholden to exactly the structure of wealth (capitalism) and its military sources of support.

Correctly, US authority perceives the dangers raised by Manning and Snowden, that of awakening the people to a real understanding of the privileged total sham, which passes for public policy, under which *we all live*. Hence, secrecy, surveillance, intimidation, at home, atrocities abroad, whatever it takes to keep the show on the road, except that with Manning and Snowden the world can see America's gnawing fear about being found out, the lengths to which it will go to remain on top, rather than live among others peacefully and modestly, two words absent from the national vocabulary.

Obama plots hegemony, hegemony by every available means, starting from the modernization of the nuclear arsenal through the pursuit of paramilitary operations on a grand scale and global in



scope. Manning and Snowden, each obstructs the path of the juggernaut, each identifies humanity as a transcendent ideal, each has a conception of patriotism in which the president's much-vaunted trade-offs between national security and privacy are seen as phony and odious in the extreme, for there are no trade-offs where freedom is concerned, and the best national security lies in not doing harm to others.

Aggression meets retaliation. And privacy is the last thing wanted, when it is the burden of government (here Obama-Holder-Brennan-NSA-DOJ-FBI-CIA-JSOC, etc. etc.) to instill a false sense of pride, the official brand of patriotism, into the consciousness of its people (subjects?) of military glory and the triumph of American business in the markets of the world. The assault on privacy, precisely like the wanton killing of civilians through drone strikes, a one-two punch of domination that is intended to put the world on notice of America's capacity for acting unrestrained and with impunity, puts the raw component of power on display for others to see, appreciate, and submit to. Surveillance at home, under the spurious cover of counterterrorism, naturally a good idea, indeed brilliant in that using the hostility built up over decades (anticommunism) to tap into the latest manufactured scare, is an idea any self-respecting despot and his national-security advisers would approve.

For in this way, the populace internalizes its own false consciousness and thereby affords the leadership free grace to pursue its military adventures. Surveillance and the commission of war crimes, these become the Patriotic Duo of US culture, ideology, and politics. With that becoming set in stone, can fascism be far behind?

JUNE 14, 2013

### **Chinese Warships Off Long Island**

Flash! President Li of China, writing in *Foreign Affairs* has announced his long-awaited Atlantic-first strategy, in which a battle group of super carriers will ply the waters from Portsmouth to Charleston, set to commence upon the signing of a mutual security treaty with Bermuda, where the carriers are presently docked, along with long-range bombers having nuclear capabilities. This "pivot," in which important military assets and diplomatic initiatives (including the offer of joint-maneuvers) presents a new framework of regional penetration and geopolitical thinking, has resulted from top-secret meetings of Li's national-security advisers and the highly placed intelligence experts drawn from China's own NSA and CIA, the agencies which have been given carte blanche by the president to act on his doctrine of permanent war. Some Chinese defense experts are skeptical in that they desire a more direct confrontation than is afforded by the broadly construed containment policy, a view with which the president finds himself in agreement. But all sides of the civilian-military establishment are in agreement that a war posture is good, and perhaps necessary, both to ensure domestic conformity and provide an economic stimulus to prevent stagnation and ward off recession. Li is particularly fortunate in having a compliant parliamentary body to work with, patriotic and reactionary to the core, wholly submissive to the policies of intervention, targeted assassination, domestic spying, a lax-to-nonexistent regulatory protocol to foster monopolism, above all, perhaps, a somewhat inchoate yet at the constant-ready-to-be-acted-on vision of universal counterrevolution, starting here with bringing the US into line, that is, accepting China's leadership and guidance in world affairs.

Sound familiar? I have merely taken Obama's Pacific-first strategy and inverted the imagery to suggest, rather, what the US has done with respect to China, in which a confrontational military, diplomatic, economic, and ideological posture, all rolled into one, has been advanced by the United States to contain, isolate, and, to the extent that it is viewed as a statist formation, *liberate* China, so that it will be free to enjoy the fruits of American-style capitalism—what, in grandiose form, is meant by the phrase, “liberal humanitarian interventionism.” Obama's specialization, which combines the “just war” policies of Brennan, the rhetoric of Rhodes, the new window dressing on intervention with the appointments of Rice and Power, the widening in the CIA's mission and jurisdiction, is unashamedly global dominance, as though by Divine right, or at the least, the self-evidence of Exceptionalism, coupled with a dollop of modernized nuclear weaponry and the use of paramilitary forces (JSOC) in support of the framework.

Global dominance need not be Hitlerian, hardly proper to the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize—although stranger things have happened. Despite critics' efforts at psychological understanding of Obama, he thus far, and expertly, eludes analysis. But we do have a record, not, as his supporters would hope, a bundle of contradictions that allows for escape hatches (e.g., Republican obstructionism), but a unitary direction: pro-intervention, pro-corporate wealth, anti-environment, anti-regulation, and, if his record on mortgage relief, job creation, and, at large, the social safety net is any indication, *anti-poor*, anti-working people, all taken together, a quite despicable elitism saturated with military-authoritarian values of social and economic hierarchy and a puristic market fundamentalism reflecting the unimpeded accumulation of wealth. This noble set of virtues has to be defended at all costs—not only from China, but from America's citizens at home, and for Obama, the best defense, next to military power, is the secrecy of government. Hence, not Hitlerian, but domestic self-pacification. How? One technique is to create the conditions for the body politic to be suspicious of all things radical (here, not necessarily Marxian collectivism, but simply, the questioning of Authority, whether on war policy or the free pass to oil companies, and the list stretches long into the night).

Increasingly, the Obama government is conflating radicalism and terrorism, the ace it plays to infuse Americans with a war psychology that permits not only the “war on terror,” but also the Pacific-first strategy and greater military presence in the region. China is terribly significant to America's purposes. In Dulles-like splendor, Obama is playing rollback, China being the Supreme Challenge to Freedom-Loving America, an oblique reference to terrorism generically conceived and perhaps one step removed. It cannot be otherwise, for how else prepare Americans for a get-tough policy that might eventuate in conflict? With this consideration in mind, one has reason to link US China policy with the widespread use of surveillance, and relatedly, an equally widespread practice of overclassification of government documents, in both cases, an imperial flexing of political muscle serving notice on all and sundry that the US has a permanent place at the top of the global-power pyramid. In a sense, this is, for within the US, psychological-ideological overkill, because few Americans remain critical of government-business hegemony in the world. But why take chances? And so, surveillance is very much in order, less to prevent a resumption of radical movements, than to foster the *internalization* of conformity (aka, social discipline).

The recent Li-Obama meetings at Sunnylands was a piece of social theater, a pro forma gathering which, especially on the issue of cyberwarfare, could not possibly lead to agreements when, on that very day, Obama's cyberwar against his own people was becoming revealed. We now

know, if we didn't before, that he does not shame easily. Targeted assassination? Nothing. Mammoth defense budgets. Ditto. Guantanamo? Nope. Extreme disparities of wealth and power in America? Not a word. But to question China's assertiveness in international matters, when the US sits on a world system of military bases, remains engaged in military intervention, has "assets" off the China coast or in its vicinity, requires cynicism fully transparent to the Chinese, who can only admire his chutzpah. The US will persist in its demand for global preeminence, but the world structure is metamorphosing into a multi-polar system, a decentralization of power, in which China *is* a threat to American hegemony, but one that can be lived with, and which appears to be to China's liking, because, absent America's unilateral supremacy governing international trade and investment, it is able, as presently in Africa and Latin America, to seek its own welfare—as can also Russia, Japan, the European Union, Brazil, and Third World countries undertaking their own modernization and industrialization. America is saying "NO!" to an irresistible historical flow, and, notwithstanding militarism, or perhaps because of it, is in danger of being left behind. More interventions, more surveillance, ultimately, more "blowback," in which the voices of the dispossessed and the victims will be heard.

JUNE 19, 2013

### **Totalitarianism Goes Folksy**

Obama in Europe for the G-8 meetings appears to have been found out as one contemptuous of civil liberties for starters, and for that reason, contemptuous as well of a whole range of democratic tenets, from elemental legal guarantees of doing justice, to seeking peaceful development and nonintervention in international politics and economics. Surveillance is on everyone's mind—except in America. Ditto, Guantanamo; and for many, concerns about US national-security premises affecting confrontation with China and exacerbating tensions in the Middle East. America comes to Europe as Leviathan somewhat crazed, fearful, consumed with suspicions about its own people. Obama and Cameron are a delightful pair, joined at the hip by social philosophy (notably, a cavalier disregard of the poor, and high marks to capitalist upper groups) and geostrategic vision (global counterrevolution), but a relationship the former does not enjoy with other leaders at the summit. Germany has been the target of NSA spying, as per the Snowden revelations, and there and elsewhere, invasions of privacy hardly betoken confidence in Obama's integrity.

Hence, the public-relations offensive (aka, damage control) in America, where Obama, counting on his persuasive powers and the people's false consciousness, believes he can clamp down a police state—for how else describe the unprecedented surveillance at home to this degree?—which will be met by little or no resistance. In fact, his arrogance in this respect now shows more clearly. On the Charlie Rose show (June 17), timed to coincide with his European trip, Obama presents a classic demagogic defense of his surveillance policies. Language is revealing. Think Willie Stark, modeled after Huey Long, in *All the King's Men*, the bobbing and weaving, the guttural bragging, when you read the interview: "Some people say, 'Well, you know, Obama was this raving liberal before. Now he's, you know, Dick Cheney.'" And he continues, "Dick Cheney sometimes says, 'Yeah, you know, he took it all lock, stock and barrel.' My concern has always been not that we shouldn't do intelligence gathering to prevent terrorism, but rather, are we setting up a system of checks and balances?"

When a political leader refers to himself *in the third person*, run for the hills! This remoteness from the self, as though an on-looker, signifies what some admirers call Obama's "cool," but which might better suggest the extreme depersonalization, of self and OTHERS, which allows him to order the targeted assassination of human beings, their vaporization, leaving a blood spat, with no charges brought against the person, sometimes even identity unknown, while, following the patriotic glow of Terror Tuesdays, the president can enjoy a good night's sleep. Depersonalization also provides the needed escape hatch from accountability and responsibility. The glibness in setting up Cheney as a straw man, to thereby show his, Obama's, own purported liberalism [I use the term in its popular guise, rather than its actual antiradical function and record], is a familiar high-school debating technique. But it is his contention that surveillance is constitutionally acceptable in present circumstances—we can skip over whether or not it is mere "intelligence gathering," a disarming euphemism, and effectively prevents terrorism—that defies belief and makes one want to cry out at the distortion.

The government has *no* system of checks and balances, and rather a self-constructed closed circle of legitimation and authorization. The FISA court is not only a rubber stamp, as many observers have said, but also a microcosm of all that is rotten in the state of—Obamaland. It is secret from start to finish, even as to its proceedings, basement jurisprudence unworthy of any sort of legal standing. Nor do Obama's claims of having consulted Congress on surveillance mean much, given that body's supine nature—Sen. Feinstein's Intelligence Committee *serves and protects* the intelligence community—and the precondition of nondisclosure attached to the briefings. But in a larger sense, "checks and balances" has been simply chucked out the window, from Obama's own quite drastic increase of Executive Power, to a dysfunctional Congress anxious, on a bipartisan basis, to please capitalist and military upper groups (thus complementing the Executive branch, although with sufficient confusion as to how to advance capitalism and imperialism as to become bogged down), to a Supreme Court so unmindful of rule of law and civil liberties that in such matters as surveillance it hardly checks or balances anything.

Obama, as Peter Baker reported on the Rose interview in the *New York Times*, claimed that "he had made important changes from the policies of George W. Bush, including making sure that surveillance was approved by Congress and a secret foreign intelligence court." Congressional approval, to a picked handful, predisposed to accept, and muzzled to boot. As for the foreign intelligence court, Baker himself fails to see the irony in his use of "secret" to describe it. And finally, in the fashion of Willie Stark, who gives to his own leadership, as well as the totalitarian framework under construction, its endearing folksiness, Obama states: "But I think it's fair to say that there are going to be folks on the left—and what amuses me is now folks on the right who are fine when there's a Republican president, but now, Obama's coming in with the black helicopters." Third-person Obama to the rescue, the happy medium between left and right, just doing his job, selfless, indifferent to praise or blame: "...these programs [i.e., surveillance]...have disrupted plots, not just here in the United States but overseas as well." Spying, like targeted assassination, has become the American way—they deserve being paired, as symptomatic of the desperation implicit in the subconscious acknowledgement of an erosion of military-ideological-economic power on the world stage.

JUNE 21, 2013

## **Militarizing Capitalism**

America is going through the worst of days under the fiction (aka false consciousness) of these being the best of days. We learn only today, all part of the Snowden revelations about government surveillance, that the National Security Agency (the world's largest spying operation, domestic and foreign) has an extremely close and still growing working relation with Silicon Valley (putatively, the harbinger of world democratic forces via the potentialities of the social media hastening connectivity), a political-structural imbrication of the public and private spheres draining the life-blood of human freedom of its citizenry: the right of PRIVACY, a main constituent of the individual's autonomy, not constrained or shaped by thought control. Why this encroachment on our very identities as persons, not the beliefs and roles we are steadily indoctrinated to assume, but the inner core of self-development, our unfolding possibilities?

The US is now notorious in international circles for regime change. Bad enough, but it gets worse: The US, internally, perhaps as the necessary or ratifying condition which makes broad-gauged intervention, including regime change, possible (and the implicit goal of foreign policy), has taken the qualitative jump into the culture-molding process of the *social management of personality*. We are reaching the point of no return as a nation, assigning to privatization much of the business of data mining (and it emphatically *is* a business) wherein our private lives are stripped as nearly bare as possible, the information routed to government for purposes of surveillance, and to private business—often the same information—so as to stimulate wants and sell goods and services.

Crass, yes! The convergence of militarism and consumerism, nay, one better, mutual reinforcement of the two as the formula for sustaining global hegemony and capitalistic growth alike, brings us to the present day, in which surveillance + privatization = the militarization of capitalism, the former keeping us in line (i.e., social discipline through tactics of fear, in order to engender self-pacification), and the latter, giving us a depth of commitment to property as a moral law unto itself legitimating capital accumulation by any and all means (i.e., intervention, regime change, foreign conquest). Is this gross exaggeration? Not if one takes Snowden's revelations seriously and weighs the activities of the National Security Agency (except for turf wars, inseparable from those of the CIA, FBI, and other assorted intelligence units, chiefly, of the military services) as the direct channel into the lives and minds of Americans—and, we see, foreign nationals—providing the conditions for totalitarianism where free choice is nonexistent and dictated from above.

*Then*, US expansionism (a euphemism for the combined thrust of imperialism and militarism) will have free reign throughout the world, aided and abetted through the promotion of the political culture of complicity in all things pertaining to war, consumption, and the inculcation of patriotic values, the last-named decisive to the reshaping of America itself so that class structure will reflect wide differentials of wealth and power—the poor as prime candidates for self-pacification in the name of the greater good. We therefore punish ourselves, a collective self-sacrifice on behalf of the glorification of power and force, as though foreign conquest can be fed back into our empty hulks (consciousness), at the expense, gladly surrendered, of a vital social safety net, a more egalitarian social structure, and freedom to think, criticize, and create *alternative* social systems and political economies. Hence, the masochistic element promoting capitalism and militarism to the detriment of domestic well-being.

But what of sadomasochism, delight in the infliction of pain on others, a delight in cruelty, as, these days, the horrid impersonality of incinerating others from 8,000 miles away, be they “collateral damage,” such as women and children in the vicinity of the drone strike, “signature strikes,” the deliberate targeting of funerals for the victims and of first responders coming to their assistance, or suspicious individuals, often identity unknown? Here our own masochism (sacrificing social needs on the altars of wars, intervention, nuclear modernization, and humongous “defense” spending) justifies, to ourselves, our aggression to others, obviously ungrateful to the bearers of liberty and democratic gifts. As one contemplates the scene, which I intimately associate with Obama (given his active promotion of secrecy, surveillance, and the criminalizing of divulging information exposing despotic government and illegal activities), possibly more than his predecessors, one comes to see the psychopathological nature of American capitalism, as *requiring* surveillance at this stage of possible senescence, in order to sustain itself. The foregoing thoughts were prompted by the *New York Times* editorial (June 20), which rightly criticized the conspicuous place of private contractors in intelligence gathering, and a further article on the close ties between NSA and Silicon Valley. My Comment on the editorial follows:

Privatization has become the curse of American democracy. Even specifically in intelligence, it radiates out to include the fusion of capitalism and national security, rendering government the midwife to the policy goals of business implemented via the use of force. Say what one will about Snowden (and I, for one, view him as a national HERO), his revelations have brought to light what had been a secret world of private contractors. Who paid attention to Booz Allen previously? Who imagined a half-million civilians with security clearance? The US govt. has created a moral monstrosity, in which the impetus to war, and its planning, provide the favorable environment for these private-sector firms to garner immense profits—giving them ample reason to perpetuate overclassification and render findings suitable to intervention.

Like it or not, Obama must be held accountable for this militarization of capitalism itself. Deficit reduction? Not until the entire military sector is drastically reduced. Civil liberties? Not until the govt. stops prosecuting whistleblowers under the Espionage Act. The future of democracy? Regrettably, bleak, when surveillance is central to the execution of public policy.

JUNE 24, 2013

### **An Age of Democratic Ferment?**

Egypt, Turkey, Brazil, a slowly awakening realization that the contemporary political-social order, even allowing for specific national differences of history, structure, and population composition, has not been responsive to peoples’ needs and inmost aspirations (which no amount of repression can entirely quell). Yet, America obviously lags far behind, its own people manifestly incapable of empathizing with others’ social struggle—except for phony talk at the presidential level about freedom and oneness, as in the Cairo speech, and now, Berlin—and instead, clinging to propagandistic verities presently gathered up under the heading of counterterrorism, succumb to the toxic formula of patriotism-consumerism-xenophobia, the last-named because radical, immigrant, terrorist, rolled together, becomes the Other to which law is suspended and anything goes. That the Occupy Movement tied itself in knots with its anti-elitist rituals (even to the extent of regarding programmatic demands, since not all would agree, as to be avoided), and, despite mammoth

problems at home, allowed itself to drift, and ultimately fizzle, only goes to show the depth of America's slumber. Not even political theater, however superficial, can find purchase.

Brazil today should make us all shame, except that US ruling groups remain in their comfort zone, fast in the knowledge in spite of gross provocations (the rise in fares in public transportation in Brazil hardly compares with *the increasing destruction of the public sphere itself* in America, and the current assault on the social safety net) , that the American people have not risen, or perhaps cannot rise, to the dignity of self-assertion, self-determination, self-awareness, in response to the policies and conditions brought about by what can only and necessarily be described as a unified upper stratum of wealth and power, fast coalescing around its financial and military elites. In this context, surveillance now appears wholly *adventitious*, i.e., unnecessary, gratuitous, because the people are and have been already cowed, so that government measures become merely taunting examples and flaunting gestures to serve as reminders of where power lies. We see an unconscious servitude to the presumed goodness and virtue (in the old days, "Exceptionalism" would do) of capitalism per se, and, the lesson being driven home, capitalism in its structural evolution into an advanced-mature form, eviscerating the political state in favor of privatization in all things (thereby leaving the social safety net in limbo), imbricated with a colossal military underpinning to create hoped-for permanent stability and expansion.

One is struck by just how much the government now takes for granted, beginning perhaps with the nation's habituation to secrecy and, with it, war, intervention, regime change, targeted assassination, Espionage Act prosecution, a deteriorating environment, un- and underemployment, a ramshackle state of affairs *if this were a democratic polity*, but par for the course when upper groups pursue their own interests (in the name of the nation and the people), letting all else, including societal privations, go by the board. Obama is the perfect embodiment of these trends, himself, not a causal factor, but happy to preside over the main contours of US historical development pointing toward the advent of a monopoly capitalism founded on the ethos and practice of, yes, privatization, affecting consciousness itself (as in the affirmation of greed and profits at-any-price) and wealth-inequality of a lopsided social structure, and, hand-in-hand, militarization of the factors promoting dynamism and growth in the system, such as trade, investment, ideological penetration, and, of course, the degree of global hegemony essential to prescribing the terms for their success—military supervision on a world scale.

Whether anything comes of the stirrings of unrest abroad, for Brazil, eruption for the moment is more like it, America reveals its inner dormancy with regard to political democratization of its social structure, economic framework, legal practices and juridical principles, and, more germane than ever, national-security assumptions and policies (for these too are fit subjects of democratization, for hegemonic aims, purposes, and actions do not conduce to the equal treatment, or respect for the dignity and welfare, of other peoples). Soon, it appears, political democratization will be perceived as a species of terrorism in its own right, the test being: what undermines the foundations of American institutions. For we do to ourselves what no terrorist can accomplish, the denigration of once-thought (if even then never fully honored) imperishable truths of freedom of conscience and social justice. The past, it seems, is coming back with a vengeance, this despite all the marvels of technology and so-called progress; for America is continually on the war path—the Open Door at the mouth of the cannon, the promiscuous intervention into the lives and thoughts of its citizens (think Alien & Sedition Acts, Palmer Raids, McCarthyism, HUAC in the past), brought

forward in the terrifying reach of the National Security Agency and its data mining on a hitherto unattainable scale, and, not least, the government of, by, and for the wealthy, perhaps a constant from administration to administration, with possibly one interlude, the New Deal.

Even pessimism is passé. Instead, numbness, indifference, a sinking back into a shrunken self, titillated by bread and circuses for relief, but constructive action for social change—look elsewhere, if at all. I know these are not comforting thoughts (in my own case, and that of *CP* contributors and readers, the more so because we've lived a lifetime of political action, and, hopefully, *refuse to stop now*), yet while the world's peoples begin to awaken or re-awaken to their exploitation, America is a backwater of reaction. This means senescence pure and simple, the danger being that the US in a destructive fury will want to bring the world down to its level (of societal nihilism and/or jadedness) through the one thing it knows, and prepared the most for, best: military power and aggression. I pray Brazil is able to sustain its momentum, which, at least in the short run, may destroy America's lethargy and allow its people—all of us—to see how our leadership has betrayed our interest. In the eyes of Obama, and the senators and representatives of both major parties, that would make us all terrorists.

JUNE 25, 2013

### **Edward J. Snowden and the Exposure of Voyeuristic Fascism**

One person can make a difference in the affairs of state. 21<sup>st</sup> century political civilization has become habituated to international relations as the province of mega-units in something akin to an uneasy, disturbed condition of equipoise, in which underlying structural-economic-ideological forces, prone to confrontation, have become artificially muted: a surface of politesse, seething beneath, intended to disguise national strivings for power. Not all the presumed hegemonic players are alike in composition, direction of their historical course (ascending or descending), or geopolitical strategies for their survival and/or expansion. Self-evidently, China is rising in global influence, Russia, an injured giant finding its way through a mixed political economy and withdrawal symptoms from its previous expansionist phase, and the US, though for a century seeking and frequently achieving unilateral world leadership, now seemingly a wild card, capable of anything in order *to remain on top*. In this setting, individuals, until very recently, did not appear to matter, at least those excluded from positions of power—the vast majority of humankind, for whom the role of passivity coincided with the rise of mass, centrally directed technologies and organization, foreordained in practice to dwarf individual identity and sense of actuation in shaping their lives.

It is, of course, too early to tell, but events of popular history in such a brief span of time, occurring nevertheless still somewhat at the periphery of power politics—i.e., Egypt, Turkey, now Brazil (which could not help but ride the momentum from these currents of change)—have reintroduced the possibility of human transcendence over reified institutions and their leadership. No, we have not entered, thus far, a New Revolutionary Age, but in the last two weeks—a sliver of time as wars and the violation of civil liberties go—America has suddenly lost face, stature, and the moral high ground it has always claimed, and stands exposed, more than in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, to the world's and its own people's understanding as the invader of human dignity and privacy, priceless attributes distinguishing democracy from totalitarianism. This did not begin



Inauguration Day 2009, but Obama must be held responsible for the intensification of pressures whose consequence has been the attempted breakdown of the human personality.

Too strong a formulation? Everything points in support, notably the secrecy which attaches to government, a purposeful magnification of the powers of the State, as in the necromancy of unlimited reach and potency as a given, because its identity lies obscured behind layers of classified documents, and the skilled art of obfuscation. From that base of operations (one equates secrecy with “invisible,” “stealth,” the freedom to commit illegal acts, and here, the accumulation of Executive Power for its own sake, and specifically the conjunct of military, paramilitary, and intelligence dimensions reinforcing its expansion and aggrandizement), the absolutist bonds of dependence on, and belief in, the leadership is *mandatory* if the structural schema of monopoly capitalism in America, and its correlative needs for continued growth in order to stave off contraction and stagnation, are to succeed. Nothing can be left to chance, least of all public awareness and an acute political consciousness able to penetrate the wall of secrecy and perceive the deeds, such as targeted assassination, regime change, and the euphemistic “humanitarian interventionism,” for what they are: preliminaries for, or the actual commission of, WAR CRIMES, that which Obama and the National-Security State neither he, his advisers, the complicit Congress and judicial system, the military and intelligence communities, nor the political economy to which the foregoing are either beholden or emotionally and ideologically identify with, can countenance and still show their collective face to the world as other than hypocrites, cynics, opportunists, war-mongers and –breeders, in clinical terms, as I see it, psychopaths.

In this context, Snowden enters the picture, surprisingly aware of all that is at stake, as witness his eloquent statements about how the denial of civil liberties negates and repudiates a democratic society, and from there, recognizes the magnitude of crime associated with surveillance. An individual, alone, powerless at the outset, has spoken out, and doing so, has shaken the foundations of power. This, more than a high point in the record of whistle-blowers, though intimately related to it, marks an epochal moment in the history of American freedom—or the search for it! It mustn’t be allowed to slip by as a result of the chorus of denunciation, from POTUS on down through all the usual suspects, Democrats and Republicans alike. Snowden has raised *privacy* into the pantheon of constitutional rights it deserves to be, as the index of societal health and individual personhood—something all the nefarious interventions, drone strikes, CIA-JSOC missions of subversion, indefinite detentions, have sought to obliterate from the popular consciousness, and until now, partially succeeded in doing.

SURVEILLANCE is not accidental strategy, but rather the cutting edge of individuals’ self-pacification, a well-tested mechanism of social control. One hesitates to speak, then even to think; one chooses one’s associates warily, lest found on someone’s *list*, the all-pervasive fear of being watched, dissected, analyzed by the prying eyes of the State, now a government-empowered and –legitimated National Security Agency (and multiple other intelligence agencies, along with such legislative onslaughts as TALON, CIFA, TIAP, and don’t forget MATRIX, Multistate Anti-Terrorism Information Exchange, some of which going even too far for Congress’s reactionary taste), fully capable of spying on and retrieving the most intimate conversations between people hitherto unsuspecting of eavesdropping. Hopefully, suspiciousness of government will ensue, even though practices of this nature continue, because, as political theory teaches us, democratic society

and government are founded on trust, without which, there can be no social compact—and start expecting the worse.

Snowden put his finger in the dike holding back the sea of totalitarianism, itself not an inaccurate designation any longer, i.e., if one believes that civil liberties is the linchpin of its polar opposite, a social democracy based on the respect for and equal treatment of the individual under the rule of law, because what the US government has done is destroy the American constitutional-social fabric, in the process making a mockery of the law through trampling on traditional safeguards to freedom of thought and rights of association, protection from unwarranted searches and seizures, and down a slippery slope to everything from use of informers, planted evidence, “dirty tricks,” to encouragement of mutual suspicion, the breakup of radical organizations, whatever government deems central to its interests, safety, and continued lawlessness.

Snowden turned the spotlight on the forbidden territory of the dark world inhabited by the Obama administration, a reaching out of tentacles not only in America but on a world basis, as his revelations of PRIMUS and foreign communications intercepts, including wiretaps of diplomats and conferences shows. The details are familiar by now, from the *Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, to the Continental press and worldwide—a story that will not go away, given the enormity of the offense and the hypocrisy of Washington. For this reason, I believe Snowden is a marked man in Obama’s eyes, to him to be practically equated with Osama bin Laden, and therefore, being in Obama’s cross-hairs, if not through rendition (“accidents will happen”) then a direct target of paramilitary operations, Snowden is right to fear for his life and to seek asylum. At this writing, he has landed safely in Moscow, through, as reported, the cooperation of Chinese and Hong Kong authorities (creating diplomatic friction between them and the US) and will be in transit to a third country. The Damoclean sword of the Espionage Act will have to await other victims, sure to turn up in light of Obama’s obsession with secrecy and personal hostility toward being crossed. As I’ve said before, secrecy for him is insurance against being discovered for having committed war crimes.

Snowden cannot be allowed to go free, not because he divulged State Secrets, but because he symbolizes the power—may I say, sublimeness?—of truth, particularly against what he exposed as a pack of political criminals, and beyond that, exposed, through their workings, the inner springs of repression on which American society and its structure of power depend, namely, self-pacification as an overriding state of moral-political inaction of body and mind, a rejection of social protest in thought and deed, the individual subject to cues provided by acute patriotism, consumerism, and the heavy-handed militarization of Authority. *That*, we could see, and for some, speak out against. But this added factor, brought out by Snowden, of surveillance, gives self-pacification silent and powerful reinforcement: the fear of terrorism, itself contrived by government to justify security arrangements bordering on informal regimentation, has become transformed/extended into what psychologists would term—if only they examined consequential societal issues—the “introjection” of the entire power system in America, including its capitalist and military foundations, and the people’s own expected docility to its furtherance, goals, and ideology. That is a big burden to carry around, even if unnoticed (the test of repression’s value and successfulness to an authoritarian government), which leaves the individual naked and vulnerable to the extreme politicization of mindset designed to eschew critical thinking, and rather, glorify the State.

Domestic spying of the breadth and scope practiced by the NSA (which along with the CIA has become Obama's Janus-faced look toward both internal and external acts of structural-political subversion) becomes the handmaid of counterterrorism, the latter, now self-legitimated through government edict thus spreading a cloak of legitimacy as well around the former. Surveillance is good! We hear *ad nauseum* that there must be a balance struck between security and privacy, with the former invariably taking precedence—a convenient debater's trick because the former can be infinitely enlarged, and the latter, a straw man, toothless to boot. America's fear of terrorism, itself a form of terrorism practiced on the people, paves the way for domestic spying on the part of Authority with impunity. Surveillance, as we are made aware by Snowden's revelations, becomes so pervasive and institutionally entrenched (the recent exposure in the *New York Times* of the close relationship between the NSA and Silicon Valley confirms what he already has shown in the way the government has gained the cooperation of Google and others, our presumed agents, via the social media, of liberation) as to render one fearful, apathetic, in the face of Inevitable Technology and Big Government, that our turn may be next in the docket, the FISA Court applauding in the background, fearful, that is, that we may be suspected of ultimate subversion if we do not conform to every tenet, measure, operation, transmitted from On High.

Regrettably, America is not Brazil (assuming the mass protest has legs and, unlike the Occupy Movement, fashions programmatic remedies and develops alternative political-economic formations, not frightened away by charges of elitism because unanimity is not achieved). But perhaps I underestimate the degree of discontent in America, discontent not amorphous (of which there is an abundance), but chained to disciplined thinking and, given a deteriorating situation on all fronts, finding the courage once more to act, as was seen in the civil rights movement and segments of the antiwar movement. Authority remembers well, even when we, frequently as participants, forget, and for that reason I suggest the drastic steps of surveillance and wreaking havoc on the Constitution make *perfect sense* to America's upper groups, just as using armed drones for targeted assassination makes perfect sense, because they perceive the dangers ahead, real or imagined, to the continuation of their power and privileges, the nation's accustomed position of hegemony, and their own introjections of values skewed to their interests, including the exalted place for militarism in every aspect of American life.

Militarism and surveillance are kissing cousins, each depends on the acceptance of prescribed ORDER. That order, a supreme ideological value of an hierarchical class structure such as we have now more than ever, with wide disparities of wealth and power, has in different, though largely nonpolitical, ways been challenged for some time, yet still awaiting focus—which Brazilian ferment, still a straw in the wind, may (along with Greece and Turkey) inspire. In any event, conformity is wearing thin, given multiple sources of discontent in American culture and society, building from civil rights, protest over Vietnam, and the rebelliousness of the counterculture, to what could be but has not yet been fashioned into a recognizable adversarial force for structural-economic-social change through the brute facts and experience of unemployment, mortgage foreclosure, rape of the environment, and the endless march to war, intervention, military stockpiling, and the abridgement of working-class rights and civil liberties. There is a crack in the façade of order, as understood by ruling groups, which, despite earlier abilities to control (and even sublimate into the time-honored paths of consumerism), can no longer be tolerated, particularly because they themselves perceive America's changing position, its relative decline, in a now-multipolar world system beyond their powers of unilateral hegemony—therefore making the

demand for conformity all the more urgent and satisfying. Here counterterrorism, especially via surveillance, comes into its own, a context ideally suited to stopped ears and hushed mouths. Protection of the Homeland, above all!

Snowden blows to smithereens the pious claims of American Exceptionalism, a city on the hill made up of political demagogues, snoopers, voyeurs, mercenaries, and the scavengers in our midst, supercomputers to the ready, armed with preconceived notions of enemies lurking in the dark, a wholesale assemblage of vile operatives who are cloaked in the Flag, seemingly unassailable—until one person came along to reveal the public garbage masking itself as national security. This writer wishes him God’s speed to safety, long life, good health. The nation, whether it knows it or not, is indebted to Snowden’s bravery and moral conscience.

JUNE 28, 2013

### **The Carpet-Bombing of the American Mind**

USG (we have become a nation of acronyms, my sentimental favorites being NSA, CIA, JSOC, POTUS, the more acronymic the more sinister, dangerous, anonymous, lacking in accountability) thinks—and acts—*big*, no selective application of surveillance to individuals under well-defined principles and regulations, but total saturation so that the exercise becomes more than itself, more than information-gathering to detect real and potential subversion, as problematic as that may be, and instead, an exercise in thought control, intimidation, a process of internalized restraint to achieve an acquiescent citizenry, willing to accept, and thereby cementing its complicity in, the illegal application of force and power on those who have been declared enemies, domestic and foreign, of the State. This saturation of surveillance (in many ways analogous to the Big Lie technique, the greater the scope and practice, the more receding from view, as though, wrapped in secrecy, *until now*, standing on its head traditional concepts of liberty and freedom growing more distant and difficult to recognize) insidiously erodes the foundation of social justice by raising the individual’s fear of detection of his/her thoughts, the moment they even border on political-social criticism, as somehow unworthy of a now self-imposed standard of patriotism. We jump through hoops, apparently satisfied that we have made peace with an all-powerful government whose mantra is, “we have struck a balance between security and privacy,” all with knowing-wink that security is fully intended to trump privacy, the latter merely a liberal rhetorical convenience to ease the way to abject conformity disguised as the normalization of consumerism and identification with the purposes of the nation’s political-economic-military leadership. Exceptionalism filtering down, on condition of good behavior.

The Snowden Revelations, highly deserving of capitalization, tear the cover away of incipient American totalitarianism, a structural-ideological condition seemingly unstoppable of actualization in light of the prevailing and historically developing configuration of power-interests centered on the militarization of an advanced-capitalist formation merging wealth concentration and, for its security (the security that really counts on the part of elite groups!), an aggressive foreign-policy design featuring the acquisition of markets, investments, raw materials on advantageous terms in a global order in which capitalism itself as a universal system is meant to flourish, free from the threats of alternative modes of modernization, including socialism, and in which the US maintains supremacy as the *single* world leader enforcing the ground rules of international conduct and

domestic tranquility (i.e., nonrevolutionary, nay, nonradical behavior). By that token, surveillance at home (*and abroad*) is inextricably bound up with intervention, both driving forces for making American capitalism work, and integral to that, giving permanence to an hierarchical social system organized according to class-differentiations of wealth, status, and power, in the name of market fundamentalism.

Jump, Fido, jump, and the biscuit is yours. Swooshing up *metadata* is the operant formula of achieving “security,” deserving of quotation marks because its opposite is true, not freedom from fear or anxiety, but fear and anxiety writ large, with personal knowledge of the self an open book to government agents, inspectors, officials, all custodians of public virtue and therefore, social control. Our leadership is time-tested, having gone through an educational process of pleasing, and satisfying the concerns of, Vested Interests (thank you, Veblen, a century ago, for delineating the structure of power and its ideological complexion), so that in climbing the political ladder their respectability is assured, especially a thorough disconnect from the people they are presumed to serve. Surveillance bespeaks not simply contempt for privacy, but contempt for the human identity individuals seek to fashion, the one chance they have, in their lives, the act of living, before they die. Taking this away, in the name of a Greater Good, whether the promise of protection or the invitation to cheer on military triumphs, reeks of duplicity, the double-talk of freedom and servitude, one as cover for the other.

Obama is skilled at that. He has fine-tuned the machinery of government to assure that secrecy is the shield behind which Executive Power continuously expands, chiefly in the construction of the military and intelligence communities’ growing integration of purpose and operation, yes, the National-Security State, to become institutionalized on a permanent basis, the armed drone for targeted assassination as, according to the planning of he and John Brennan, the type form for binding future administrations to an acceptance of the doctrine of permanent war. There will always be enemies, always be terrorists, even if they happen to be ourselves, dissidents at home, whom, through surveillance, find themselves on hit lists constantly updated as standard procedure for legitimating the climate of fear *and* acceptance of war. *That* eventuality may seem far off, yet can be, and is being, done with impunity abroad, which augers poorly for erecting civil-liberties defenses at the water’s edge. Lawless conduct and norms have a way of metastasizing, precedents for barbarism (whether Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, multiple cases in Latin America) established in one place spread as malignant growth reaching all the way to, here, the US body politic. Surveillance, secrecy, deceit, punitive treatment of whistleblowers, are the rational steps of incipient totalitarianism on-the-march, to hide its sins of commission (war) and omission (failure to address poverty, unemployment, climate change, business and banking regulation), a combination of failed, indeed, treacherous, leadership, unbeatable, so long as surveillance continues. Snowden is our David, in the fight against Goliath, where the overwhelming preponderance of force, subterfuge, the machinery and practice of thought control lie all to one side.

However, to be intimidated by that, is to hand the victory over to quite disreputable figures, with the military and big capital guarding their back, without a fight, nothing which would please them more and the System over which they preside. Surveillance is no ordinary stratagem of control, but a pathological desire (what I term elsewhere, “voyeuristic fascism”), sadistic in inspiration, to *terrorize* all with whom one disagrees, seeks to exercise superiority over, or, worse still and above all, derives pleasure in the hurt and depersonalization of others—usually, though not recognized by

the perpetrator, as hatred of the self. In this case, an almost structural-historical self-hatred, compounded of the emptiness of life under consumerism, and the buried guilt of atrocities committed in the name of freedom. No wonder the official attitude toward Snowden; the Augean stable needs a thorough cleaning out, from POTUS to Pentagon to so-called regulatory agencies to Congress to the judicial system to paramilitary operations, to all the beneficiaries of surveillance and secrecy.

JULY 1, 2013

### **Evil is, as Evil Does**

Evil is not banal, *pace* Arendt; it is in this case (the US in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century) the systemization in government policy of an advanced capitalist society and political economy at the tipping point of structural-ideological senescence, now seemingly treading water because of economic dislocations more long- than short-term in nature, but actually poised—somewhat in desperation—to advance its militarized global expansion in an effort to maintain its unilateral position of world leadership in an international framework of multipolar centers of power, and therefore, objectively, destined ultimately to fail, a trajectory of decline eliciting a political-military response already in the present of an American-style FASCISM, the familiar concentration of wealth consolidated within and protected by an hierarchical societal formation institutionally directed to market fundamentalism and a compliant working class. In this setting, an America on the brink of totalitarianism, for good and sufficient reason, centuries'-long intervention, a steadily widening internal class-differentiation of wealth and power, xenophobia, and, since World War II, an unreasoning anticommunism having the result, intended or otherwise, of fear and abject conformity, thus muting if not silencing substantive dissent on national priorities, critical thought of ideological valuing of consumerism and capital accumulation, and informed discussion of alternative modes of social-economic development, President Obama is the near-perfect embodiment of a leader prepared to capitalize on historical trends of counterrevolution in America's foreign policy and informal methods and mechanisms of social control domestically as uniquely representative of ruling-groups' interests to carry forward a public policy entailing the financialization and militarization (the two nicely conjoined) of American capitalism. By this token, Obama is hardly a cog in Arendt's imagined bureaucratic machinery, implying inertness and perhaps a rote cruelty, but an Eichmann of a different complexion, knowingly and *actively* performing the role of facilitator and/or enabler of the hegemonic paradigm so long taken for granted and inscribed in America's ideological consciousness, yet—hence the desperation—no longer easily in reach.

He started slowly, for some reason thought anti-imperialist and economically progressive, such being the power of public relations, liberal political rhetoric, racial identity (as I state elsewhere, as a veteran of civil-rights demonstrations and organizational activity, including helping to forge a civil-rights/antiwar coalition, I am not intimidated by the liberal mindset of political correctness: Obama is *not* fit to be in the same company as blacks I protested with, or my personal hero Paul Robeson, as well as Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B. DuBois, with whom I was privileged to shake hands, etc. etc.), and hitherto undetected perfidiousness in the 2008 campaign. Axelrod *et. al.*, with the candidate's help, put something over on us—until immediately after the Inauguration when suddenly we could start to take the measure of his appointments, notably, Geithner, at Treasury,

Clinton, at State, and national-security advisers, such as Brennan, when it became apparent to those not bedazzled by appearance, Democratic-affiliation, the presumed forced-choice of Neanderthal-like reaction, that underlying continuities of policy and intent with the Bush II administration were not sundered, only deceptively glistened, a liberalization of Rightist practice and policy, as in humanitarian interventionism, same old, same old, illegal intervention, or as in health-care reform to sidetrack and obviate the need for the public option, let alone, *single-payer*, at the same time rewarding Big Pharma and the insurance companies.

Tragic, in the sense of “deplorable,” because the preponderance of what once had been the Left in America, and still styling itself liberal or progressive, has bought hook, line, and sinker, into this charade of social-welfare politics, peaceable international relations, and broad regulatory constraints on the business system (as well, we appreciate in hindsight, as indifference to, or unawareness of, the utter savaging of civil liberties), but also, tragic, in the more profound sense, in which (a) a protagonist has been defeated by (b) a stronger force, with (c) a sad conclusion exciting (d) pity, where (a) is the people, (b) the present government and its near-predecessors, (c) a terror-struck populace becoming habituated to social control at home and the doctrine of permanent war in foreign affairs, and (d) the eclipse of the nation’s democratic structure, form, and legitimacy, through increased reliance on CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, armed drones for targeted assassination, stupendous military appropriations coupled with, in both budgetary and ideological terms, the shrinking and weakening of the social safety net—all, the burden of this book, under the “stewardship” of Obama, as a qualitative jump within, or intensification of, the broad historical continuum bequeathed by his predecessors. Obama is more than a sophisticated version of the hapless Bush II, his very sophistication, aided by the aforementioned liberalization of the extant Right, making him the more dangerous, from the standpoint of war policy and planning (e.g., the Pacific-first strategy for the containment and isolation of China) and government-business relations, a process of deregulation started under Clinton and systematized more adroitly under Obama. Even Cheney, with all his brashness, could not give more favorable treatment to the oil companies than Salazar of Interior.

This could have been written before the revelations of Edward J. Snowden, but the wide net of surveillance spread over the American people (and also foreign nationals) by the National Security Agency is of such moment as to confirm the political-structural-ideological trends toward an incipient totalitarianism no longer dismissible as ranting, conspiracy-theorization, or other forms of put-down. The danger is real. My life had been one of activism. Here I’m not interested in “solutions,” which, frankly, turn out to be, “Please, Mr. President, don’t you see....,” or, write to your congressperson or senator, or contribute to a *New York Times* ad, or wave a placard and hope motorists will honk as they drive by. Obama isn’t listening, nor Brennan, nor Feinstein, nor Clapper, Petraeus, Rice, Power, Rhodes. The more one approaches on bended knee, pleading, as though to reasonable men and women, the more their appetite is whetted for going further, perhaps an unconsciously-driven sadism, perhaps not, confident that the citizenry’s naivete, apathy, ignorance, or, of course, agreement, provides open space for unrestrained conduct. Add to a faltering political consciousness, as a decisive mass phenomenon of our time, the bred-into-us submissiveness (as Theodore Adorno, in 1950, described in *The Authoritarian Personality*, or, my interpretation, the institutionalization of ego-loss or individual’s depersonalization by means of the bludgeoning of sensibility to meet the needs of consumerism and a militaristic mindset), and one readily sees the almost-epistemological foundations (because economic and structural factors must

also be taken into account) of popular docility toward and inability to mount, or fear of mounting, criticism about America per se, yet personified by its ruling groups, whether political, economic, military, and increasingly, their seamless connection.

Obama, deregulation, militarism, a systemic infusion of patriotism through media coverage, sports, even for some, the celebrity culture, as well as the failure to address climate change, unemployment, poverty, mortgage foreclosure, together point to a reification of America as God's Own Kingdom on Earth and to other nations the Holy Grail for which they are zealously ever in quest (however, not its deficiencies in public policy, such as affecting the social safety net, of which they almost unanimously oppose), or so we are asked to believe. Reification is a maddening psychological-epistemological process, as measured by an unmediated political consciousness, not subject to screens which filter out adversarial and alternative thinking, projects, values, the product broadly speaking of cultural conditioning, selectively promoted, to satisfy ruling-groups' needs and goals. Reification is the materialization of patriotic abstractions, such as freedom and democracy, which themselves have been largely honored in the breach, thus rendering the individual two steps removed from the real world on which critical awareness and heightened political consciousness depend. He/she introjects (or, if one prefers, internalizes) the very structure of power and affiliated ideas that, in turn, oppresses and/or confines the individual. Each individual becomes the incarnation of the nation in its mature, monopoly-capitalism form, a walking about in the persona of a mighty armed fortress-state, celebrating the glories of wealth accumulation and the military triumphs of battles won (even keeping a scorecard on opponents' losses), while fending off as "enemies" domestic and foreign those who dare question "legitimate" Authority, as sanctified primarily by legislation which owes its supposed legitimacy to the existing (and historically, successively replenished and renewed) structural-economic configuration of wealth and power.

Through political-cultural conditioning, then, we absorb the systemic forces, notably, the hierarchical class structure inculcating obedience and passivity, which nullify the very concept of *class* in its positive guise: the instrument of social protest to achieve goals particular to the class; simply, class self-interest as the organizational base for challenging society's dominant groups. This is wholly antithetical to the current practice of shielding the copartnership of government and business, a structural framework of capitalism intended to allow corporations and banks write their own regulations, then transmuted into legislation as the law of the land. Secretiveness here in the private realm corresponds to classification of government documents in the public, for the Obama Administration a giant repackaging of the Capitalist State for the obvious task of *concealment* of practices that, with public exposure, would be viewed as confirmatory of a totalitarian direction. Secrecy is antithetical to democracy, if by the latter we include government by the consent of the governed. Unless each and every case of classification can be justified by an impartial tribunal (itself now hopeless, given the politicization of the judiciary and of the *law* itself), classification is a lame pretext for deterring and ultimately suppressing the investigating and publicizing of government wrongdoing and criminality. Obama's passion for impaling whistleblowers is by now self-evident. Edward Snowden is *his* Osama bin Laden, in both cases the essential fulcrum which enables him to mount an expansion of Executive Power, relatedly, enlarge the military budget, a key to that expanded power, in which militarism (the civilian window dressing for which is counterterrorism, as a parallel and complementary state of mind) forms an integral part, and to ensure completeness of the Obama paradigm of governance thus far, reduce the guarantees of Constitutional rights and attendant civil liberties, as now, the dastardly practice of widespread



surveillance of the American public, whose reach encompasses the interlocking networks of “friends and allies” so as to constitute a global menace.

Evil, as I use it here, signifies the institutionalization of class political-structural-military dominance, not, however, as an impersonal force or process, but as the consciously furthered activity of power-groups in American society, determined on the globalization-of-one, a world system of capitalism, US-inspired as to ground rules and controlled as to patterns of trade, investment, and, not least, geopolitical and geostrategic arrangements and principles. Egocentric, but why also evil? Let the ghost of the vaporized child in Pakistan answer, the victim of a missile fired from an armed drone; or, the ghost of the infant in Cuba who died because of medicine denied by the American embargo for a treatable cancer; or the living ghosts in Guantanamo prison who are in a protracted hunger strike in protest against torture and unwarranted imprisonment. We don’t require disputatious academics dancing on the head of a pin to tell us what evil is. It is in front of our eyes, and if you need a mailing address, try 1400 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., with instructions to mimeograph copies to be handed out to the national-security advisers on Terror Tuesdays. Of course, said message will be instantly classified and stamped “Top Secret.”

JULY 5, 2013

### **Transcending Sectarian Differences**

Navigating through the recent events in Egypt requires more factual material (the specifics of Morsi’s record) and more intelligence (than I possess) to evaluate what is happening from a broad theoretical perspective about the nature and meaning of democratic processes and obstacles to their realization. One’s reflex action is to say, all military intervention, especially in deposing an elected leader, is wrong, to be deplored, and resisted. The Egyptian crowds, in the exact circumstances, would disagree. Their argument, as near as I can make out, is that Morsi, by his actions, traduced the Egyptian Constitution in spirit if not also in fact, and thus forfeits the right to its protection for himself and raises the question of its own adequacy to contain and counter perfidious leadership. We think of constitutions, rightly so, as constituting a higher law, a framework of governance from which standards are set forth for guiding legislation and judicial interpretation and mediating between conflicting principles and jurisdictions of authority. Wrongly, we think of constitutions as engraved in stone. Yet, the higher-dimension cannot be dismissed; altering the fundamental law should not be a product of force or expedience. So, where are we, with military intervention, a president who, despite his earlier promises, reverts to Muslim-Brotherhood partiality, and mass protest on a scale that is larger than the one that brought down Mubarak?

My point does not come easily. Military intervention is invariably a danger signal. Yet the Egyptian masses have shown themselves to be a cut above their American counterpart in political sophistication and consciousness, not least in detecting the shortcomings of Morsi. Obama has had a similarly poor record on curbing unemployment and, because he promised so much more in 2008 than Morsi ever did, fell far further short than he in execution, with still, in America, no sign of consequential, resolute mass opposition, let alone demonstrations, whether over job creation, foreclosures and homelessness, now, near-universal surveillance, but throughout, a disregard for civil liberties, protection of the environment, and widening wealth differentials (created through his own policies of feckless regulation). Who then is America to talk about events in Egypt (or

elsewhere, for that matter), deploring the removal of “the first democratically elected president,” when the US itself has been in the habit of removing democratically elected presidents for some time, the trade mark of the CIA, and more broadly, interpreting Egyptian events solely in terms of US self-interest, i.e., its own regional presence as the dominant power, the many aspects to the politics of oil, and its Israel-centric military paradigm. Again, though, what of the events? Here my faith lies in the Egyptian people—their power is greater than that of the army’s, moral, perhaps to the extent of actually transforming the Egyptian army into an authentic people’s army—or at least, by their presence, neutralizing its influence and compelling it to keep its promise of early elections.

I am encouraged because in Egypt, and Brazil and Turkey, we are witnessing mass activation against, not flat-out despotism, but somewhat moderate governments (especially, a Brazilian president herself no stranger to torture and imprisonment by the Generals), which suggests a will to democratization beyond its slow historical pace (even Morsi cannot be caricatured as Mubarak) and, I would like to think, part of an inexorable political-ideological trend in which religion, hierarchy, wealth, indeed, all manifestations of division on lines facilitating exploitation, false consciousness, self-pacification, and whatever else demeans or obstructs popular rule, is in process of weakening and eventual disappearance. This means, events in Egypt, as elsewhere, must be internally determined, obviously, without American interference. Humanitarian intervention is the cruel practice of Imperialism under liberal auspices. Obama’s initial hope was that the Arab Spring would quickly transform itself into Winter, but instead we have a New Summer, where even liberal politicians can become roasted, the people in the streets and squares of Cairo already appreciating that to be liberal is to be antiradical. Thus far, *class per se* has not been raised as a banner of justice, yet even to see through moderate government (with its air of liberalism), just as to see through sectarian warfare, supposes an incipient awareness of class: in this sense, that power is stratified on whatever lines it chooses to represent itself, this stratification, graded statuses, under whatever label, representing in practice forms of inequality and attendant inequities that must be abolished if social democracy is to prevail.

In Tahrir Square the watchword appears to be, not class consciousness, but a recognition that religious conflict (here, Morsi’s support for Brotherhood measures and appointments) is a distraction from the greater fight, economic privation facing the masses. Too, not to be underestimated, there is a clear concern that Islamic fundamentalism is a repressive force and denial of the democratic life to which the people aspire. I’m not interested in directly finding Marx’s requirements for class analysis or a class spirit because they are implied in the fact that the people are questioning, questioning the record of a failed government. Were we in America only so fortunate! My Comment to the *New York Times* article on military intervention follows (July 4):

It is too early to determine the outcome. But every media report emphasizes that Morsi was “the first democratically elected president” Egypt has had, stated ad nauseum—I say this because we view the situation with American blinders. He, like Obama, was democratically elected; he, like Obama, betrayed every promise that gained him election. I am not recommending military intervention in America. I am saying, to be democratically elected, if anything, gives the person a higher standard to meet: that of honesty, integrity, consistency in carrying forth one’s promises.

Morsi failed the test. His sectarian bias contradicted his appeal; the response in Tahrir Square was not, anti-Brotherhood per se. Rather people were saying, we must go beyond sectarian differences and address the REAL problems facing Egypt (which Morsi did not do): unemployment,

shortages in key areas, all for the sake of sectarian favoritism. I, like so many, had great faith in him, applauding his election as precisely the TRANSCENDENCE of sectarian differences. It turned out to be otherwise, and anyone who loves democracy (I do not include the Obama administration) will share the feelings of the anti-Morsi crowds, strikingly large by any measure and indicative of popular feeling.

Our \$1.3B support of the Egyptian military is obscene in its own right, as the American social safety net is in tatters. Perhaps, STOP military aid everywhere. Period.

JULY 9, 2013

### **The Sadness That is Egypt**

The recent repression of Islamists by the army appears to be a deliberate attempt to sabotage a genuine “people’s coup,” as though all along the military *used* the people cynically in order to depose Morsi and then itself remain as usual the power behind the throne. The US could not be more pleased, because confirmation of military power in Egypt pertains to a favorable relationship with Israel, the military elites of both continuing their two-to-tango dance of death. Without long-standing US aid to the Egyptian military, it is doubtful their state-within-a-state could have survived, one more example of the internal meddling, nay, curse, of American intervention where it has no business being. Of the many killed and wounded earlier this week, how many bore the marks of US aid, therefore making America complicit in the murders? When the army is free to kill fellow Egyptians (and the deafening silence of the army, the interim government, and the “liberals” offering as candidates, over these crimes), a precedent is created for turning the guns on those seeking democratic government, too.

Idealism on the part of the huge political crowd is being cruelly thrown back in their face—the army was not transformed on the spot into a people’s army, and, unless mass protest is renewed and even enlarged, perhaps never will be. What better way to move the democratic process forward than if Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, and the anti-Morsi demonstrators could unite in their demand for the complete subordination of the military *and* the necessity of inclusiveness in all phases of Egyptian life—whether or not this meets the expectations of the US and Israel? If only the masses, across sectarian lines, including full toleration of a secularist position, could realize they are being played against each other, with the Egyptian army carrying water not only for themselves, but also outside powers, the chances for democratizing Egyptian society (yes, with assurances of belonging as full members, the Muslim Brotherhood would and should be given a chance!) are immeasurably improved. As matters stand, the Egyptian people are faced with a divide-and-conquer strategy, not only for Israel’s sake, and also enlarge American influence in the region as a whole, but also to keep alive the hostility toward all things Islamic, and hence, Homeland Security in the US, massive defense budgets, open sesame to further interventions, and, I believe, the gradual fascistic direction, all pushed forward—in this case, on the backs of the Egyptian people. My *New York Times* Comment (July 9) on the military repression follows:

In this situation six months may seem an eternity. What is clearly lacking is an admission of guilt by the interim president, the army, and liberals including ElBaradei for the recent atrocity (no other word will do). Condemnation is the only path to reconciliation, and even then the latter may not be possible. We are so used to demonizing the Muslim Brotherhood that we cannot see the justice of

their present argument. I would also emphasize that the outsize rule of the army in Egyptian life would probably not be possible without the billions in military aid the US provides it. Yet Obama will not pass judgment on an obvious war crime! Power politics has been the elephant in the room: the US desire to stabilize Egypt on lines satisfactory to Israel where the military leaderships of both Egypt and Israel are in close working condition.

My hope remains: the Egyptian people will rise up against the army itself (as many have stated) if the timetable toward democratic constitutional government is not met, and in the immediate setting, denounce the massacre of Islamists and the closing of their media outlets. The surest way to ensure violence—and possibly civil war—is to continue repression. I am particularly disappointed in ElBaradei, who has not forthrightly condemned the anti-Morsi violence. And in America, we preach democracy but add fuel to the fire of military actions to kill with impunity. I am saddened for the Egyptian people, whose dreams deserve better.

JULY 12, 2013

### **The Snowden Asylum Saga**

The NYT reports on the wholly expected: US application of pressure to prevent Latin American nations from granting asylum to Edward Snowden. Why not? First in the techniques of rendition, waterboarding, habeas-corpus suspension, data-mining, overall contempt for civil liberties, and presided over by the “Assassination” President who authorizes aerial murder at his Tuesday evening soirees with a stellar cast of national-security advisers, all with a supine, bankrupt Left looking idly on. With a national resume like that, the only surprise is not ordering a Special Ops mission to Moscow to kidnap Snowden.

How dare Snowden spill the beans! Every hegemon worth its salt declares itself a National-Security State, rests comfortably with its biggest elephant in the room, its nuclear stockpile (Israel, are you also listening?), turns paramilitary operations, regime change, and economic blackmail into the fun-and-games entertainment of its Joint Chiefs, Political Honchoes, and CIA-JSOC debonair warriors, and, ear to the ground, moves in unison with the needs, ambitions, and desires of its upper capitalist stratum, itself an integral—if not paramount—part of the National-Security State. Shame on you, Snowden: stripping away the political-legal cover for war crimes. Twifold shame, Snowden, for stripping away the ideological cover of counterterrorism, not only as America’s biggest growth industry, not only as the surest way of terrorizing the American public and keeping them docile, but also, as the presently most effective way of pursuing the now age-old means for achieving global counterrevolution, counterrevolution enlarged in concept and practice to include more than taking out Left movements and governments, or even Third World efforts at realizing autonomous modernization, for the biggest challenge perceived by US policy makers appears to be China (Obama’s notorious “pivot,” the Pacific-first geostrategic framework to gain predominance in Asia and hem-in Chinese development to prevent its global political-economic influence). Snowden’s Revelations (deserving capital “R,” as a way of inaugurating a new Bill of Rights for Americans, if we only cared to listen) leaves the Administration with its pants down (cynically mooning a compliant—aka, complicit—populace), exposing the pretentiousness of Exceptionalism and Moral Rectitude by which the US knows itself (talk of false consciousness!!) in seeking

exclusive direction, guidance, leadership of a world community safe for the expansion of American capitalism.

Snowden's documents thus far released already demonstrate that the US has a finger in every pie, making it only a matter of time before that selfsame world community, especially the euphonious-sounding "friends and allies," awakens to the recognition that all are being had, whether as "partners" in military alliances, which liberally finance the military's status and power in each of the countries, participants in American-led international financial organizations (IMF, World Bank) which have determined domestic austerity policies compatible with US commercial and banking interests, or simply, as carrot-and-stick induced ideological soul mates, cemented in the spiritual bond of market fundamentalism, in which outsourcing clothing manufacturing to the semi-enslaved workers in poor Asian countries is deemed a crowning achievement. We mustn't underestimate the significance of the Revelations, which is why the USG will leave no stone unturned in seeking retribution and, more immediately, silencing the messenger. This will also serve notice on future whistleblowers, your services are not wanted; indeed, you are really domestic al Qaeda, and fair game for Obama's Tuesday soirees off the Situation Room; you, too, may find yourself on the baseball cards dealt around the table. Feel honored that your Leader cares enough about you to enlist the full apparatus of the National-Security State to squelch your activities, with the full help of AG Holder and DCIA Brennan, Rice leading the cheering section of "humanitarian interventionists." My *New York Times* Comment (July 12) follows, on the article about US full-court pressure applied to Latin American nations concerning asylum for Snowden:

If I could give my home extraterritoriality I would be honored to take in Edward Snowden as my guest. But of course even then USG would find a way to render him to a third country for torture—or simply shoot him on sight. In the eyes of the world America by its treatment of Snowden—as here blackmailing Latin American countries with sinister threats—stands out as the global terrorist, bully, war criminal.

The more we get tough the more isolated we become, a world pariah. That is the main thing, not the specific revelations about domestic and foreign surveillance, but the larger revelation: that the US believes it can dominate Latin America and the world at large. Thank you, Obama, for revealing your true despotic dimensions—while your fellow liberals and/or progressives look the other way, showing their contempt for civil liberties and privacy (true tests of a democracy). The Left in the US is morally bankrupt, worshiping at the feet of a Democratic Party distinguished only by its interventionist propensities and incipiently fascist opportunism. By all means, Biden, man the phones. You are a laughing stock.

JULY 16, 2013

### **Obama's Praetorian Guard of Capitalism**

Obama's "Hidden Hand" political strategy in his second term (Peter Baker, in *NYT*, July 16) merits notice for its utter phoniness (and *NYT*/Baker gullibility), as though a low profile, designed to convey the velvet glove of measured yet steady reform, has changed anything in his presidency, which from the start has raised sophisticated corporatism, with its full antiradical implications, policies, consequences, to a high art. Obama's legacy—it's too late for him to worry about this now—will be defined by his treachery as a leader and putative tribune of the people. In retrospect,

Nixon and Bush 2 appear as mere choirboys in comparison, not because of Obama's "smarts" (he has the brashness of a hustler, which passes in our day for intelligence), but because he can use liberalism as a backdrop for the pursuit of consistently reactionary policies, domestic as well as foreign. Liberals and progressives, especially, have been taken in, the latest enormous crime being massive surveillance which, once revealed, is allowed to become yesterday's news, attention shifting instead to Snowden's apprehension—an example where the real criminal seeks to pin the label of "criminal" on the one who exposes the crime. Liberals/ progressives sit on their hands (perhaps that's where Obama's team got the idea of the "hidden hand" as the latest selling point to cover up a record which hardly needs covering up, so far has radicals' rigor mortis set in) while data mining, Espionage Act prosecutions, the whole range of civil liberties made mincemeat of, all constitute only one area of manifold and fundamental abuses: the liberalization of cynicism, to render it palatable to the groupies, while the *haute* crowd of bankers, militarists, defense contractors, national-security advisors, DOJ apologists for international war crimes, and, as they say in the Shakespeare plays, diverse and assorted other characters, *laugh in their teeth*.

The "hidden hand" fits perfectly with Obama's (and all of Washington's, now that he has set the tone, and shown how easy it is to get away with it) compulsive-obsessive regard for secrecy, itself entwined with not only the over-classification of government documents (leading to a state-secrets defense for what amounts to as judicial immunity), but also surveillance *per se*, the need for control, the perhaps still greater need for acting with impunity, as with targeted assassination, without fear of discovery. What a bunch of miscreants on which we, as a nation, have bestowed the public trust! It gets worse, the further one probes: taxation, or the lack thereof, of corporate, banking, and individual wealth; deregulation, nonregulation, outright favoritism—take your pick, as economic concentration moves along, and the Boeings, GEs, Monsantos, Morgan, Chases, are doing very well, thank you; stonewalling and utter stupefaction when it comes to climate change; above all, a gargantuan military apparatus, and missions enough planned or secretly executed to please the most discerning connoisseur (aka, maniacal devotee of murder, mayhem, and lethal instruments of terror), with little at all remaining to maintain a social safety net worthy of the name. Under Obama, militarism = planned impoverishment. Or if not planned, nevertheless operationally the result; for the country is suffering big time, as corporate profits swell, infrastructure crumbles, education is neglected, cities decay, private equity funds blossom, all amid the inhumaneness and colossal waste of military outposts spread worldwide, naval forces steam to the Pacific, Special Ops forces gain purchase on practically every continent, a veritable merry-go-round as the music spins in tarantella fervor the tune of counterrevolution. The Obama Administration is the New Praetorian guarding the welfare of global capitalism, with a special nod to what is quaintly termed the US national interest.

My *New York Times* Comment to the Baker article (July 16) follows:

The "hidden hand" approach to presidential leadership is just one more public relations gimmick to distract attention from the substantive content of Obama's record and policies. This was a failed presidency from Day One, when it became apparent that '08 campaign rhetoric (replete with teleprompter, the Axelrod writing stable, and Americans' desperate wish to turn a corner) was plain hokey. The appointment of the Geithner-Summers team of Clinton-Rubin deregulators was the tip-off to acceptance of market fundamentalism and Wall Street rampages with impunity. And the coziness of Obama's relations with the CIA, JSOC, and the intelligence and military communities made clear an aggressive foreign policy (pace, Nobel Peace Laureate) composed of the Pacific-first

geopolitical strategy, an escalation in paramilitary operations, and, with John Brennan and “Terror Tuesdays,” the extreme ugliness and ruthlessness of embarking on a personal course (far exceeding his predecessor) of armed drones for targeted assassination.

Obama carries on, with some new faces (e.g., Rice, Powers), and new slogans, such as humanitarian interventionism, but on his watch, and with his essentially nihilistic, opportunist mental framework, we as a nation are closer to fascism than at any time in American history. Whomever constitute his “admirers,” presumably liberals and progressives, merely confirms that radicalism is dead in America, the victim of its own shallowness and false consciousness.

JULY 19, 2013

### **Elephant in the Room? No, the Whole Trumpeting Herd!**

I awoke this morning with Ibsen’s “Enemy of the People” (1882) tugging at the back of my mind because I had been puzzling earlier over the possibilities of interpreting the phrase, “elephant in the room,” frequently heard among radicals in denoting the outrageous expenditures in the national budget devoted to intervention, nuclear and conventional armaments, research and development focused on the promotion of war, and, in general, an inflated militarism, all at the expense of meeting domestic needs, as in spending on infrastructure, job creation, pollution control, health care, mortgage relief, and halting the steady diminution in the scope and efficacy of the social safety net, each of which is held hostage to the all-pervasive vacuuming of the society’s resources into the gaping maw of America’s hegemonic pretensions and its will to power. Although by this reckoning, the military-factor *is* the elephant in the room, honesty compels one to admit that even without its overarching presence, as the cesspit for dumping national resources of wealth so as to prevent the formation of a vital public sector, America’s ideological resistance to achieving the purposes of the social welfare, outside of a strict capitalistic interpretation and framework, as in contrast, say, to the creation of a single-payer health insurance system, still would hardly be realizable, given the hostility to all things *public*, thus making militarism preferable to, and the logical antidote for warding off, presumed socialism. (As I will point out, militarism is ancillary to capitalism, which I take to be the real elephant in the room.)

Remaining with current radical usage, i.e., militarism broadly conceived, to illustrate the psychological processes involved, one finds that the elephant in the room is of such gargantuan proportions that, by occupying the individual’s attention or mental space, its enormity tends to crowd out all else, making it so conspicuous as finally to become inconspicuous, to be taken for granted, no longer considered, a *given* of the seemingly permanent mindset of the individual. One moves around the elephant, as paradoxically, its size renders it invisible. Radicals who are still observant complain about this omission, specifically, that the military budget and the actual operations become no longer subject to opposition or critical scrutiny. Size in this case induces a certain numbness or ennui. But what must also be mentioned about our elephant is that size conveys, beyond invisibility, the sense of *invincibility*, which is far more dangerous to independent mental awareness. For the sheer preponderance of the military-factor in American life makes it an intimidating force (the more so because remaining largely unacknowledged), thereby inducing not simply numbness but rather the individual’s overriding feeling (still more unconscious than recognized) of powerlessness, fostering character traits of complicity, complaisance, ultimately,

categorical denial of its very existence—invincible *and* invisible, yet, by this point in what might be called the breakdown of the personality, or simply, ego-loss, in the face of organized, institutionalized, authorized *might*, also its inevitableness, as a corollary to what is invisible and invincible.

Psychological impoverishment follows like the night the day. The individual stands alone in a political culture notorious for its discouragement of solidarity-bonds, let alone class consciousness, as he/she, practically atomized by institutional design, has to encounter the weight of seemingly impersonal social forces, armed with the law (among other instruments), arrayed in solid phalanx against the dissident or, now, whistleblower. The “elephant in the room” here takes on greater significance because of mounting pressures to deny its existence. Its presence is protection against discovery, which means that in order to avoid the unthinkable—frequently the secret hidden in the elephant’s identity and function, for the individual’s psyche, is thinly-disguised barbarity—requires one to resort to obfuscatory strategies, as needed, to avoid the confrontation with reality, an unwillingness which is perfectly understandable when the particular reality, America, today, if revealed (Snowden, literally *today*), calls into question the nation’s democratic foundations, structure of government, philosophic heritage of freedom, legal and constitutional principles: Exceptionalism therefore turned upside down, leaving an exceptionalism of a quite different character—one of reaction, force, amoral international practice geared to unilateral political-economic-ideological dominance of the global system. Thus, as I wrestled with the phrase, “elephant in the room,” I was struck by how *evil* (I use the term not in its theological, but rather, common-sense application, causing suffering, etc.) induces both fascination and passivity, the first, an attraction to, and willingness to submit before, power in its many manifestations (e.g., military, political, economic) and the powerful, and the latter, a still deeper psychological characteristic, call it Thanatos, in the face of overwhelming institutional-cultural pressures, practically reaching to the instinctual level, demanding self-pacification of the individual made to stand face-to-face to Leviathan.

Militarism, however, is not alone in humbling the individual to Lilliputian size; it requires an entire societal configuration, composed of interdependent factors, to reduce the human being to stomaching the abuses of power while looking the other way. If history teaches us anything, it is that civilization has its dirty secrets, which are generally associated with exploitation, class dominance, and repression, for what else is there in plotting the ascent of ruling groups or the construction of class-arranged hierarchical social systems, let alone the process of primitive accumulation at the formative stage of capitalism, as delineated by Marx? Revealing these secrets is a serious matter, indeed, mind-boggling, for those nurtured on a political culture of patriotism, because such revelation blows the lid off our own defenses and urge to accommodate to power, and equally, if revealed to all, and not only the victims, blows the whistle on the particular systemic mechanisms of power (which may vary from one society to another) constructed for the successful functioning of a basic power-relationship and its political-cultural maintenance and support. Even ruling groups have to believe in their superiority, prerogatives, and right to rule, or at least give the appearance of entitlement in that regard, lest they encourage resistance by betraying a lack of confidence.

As a first approximation, I suggest that militarism (and the use of military force) is the “elephant in the room” in America, the concretization of power seeping down into the collective unconscious



drawing everyone together into a cohesive whole, making for a residual *fear* of the intimidatory force at the societal core which must be psychologically appeased, otherwise risking one's isolation from the community and a crushing loss of identity. Ibsen early and brilliantly describes the collective mentality that fashions conformity into a state of political acquiescence, as here, in covering up the secret of the contaminated public baths, on which the town based its economic prosperity, health-giving reputation, and the prestige of its leaders, a secret, then, to be kept on pain of moral—and economic—bankruptcy should it be revealed, therefore one requiring self-suppression both of moral choice and realism itself. This abdication of reason, truth, political consciousness, is an invitation to a demiurgic Thanatos, permeating society with an implicit death-wish when human autonomy has been surrendered on the altar of power.

Indeed, a militarism-centered social order almost by implication courts disaster, its life-affirming energies objectively (yet probably unconsciously) thwarted as the whole of the welfare sector becomes proportionately degraded to finance the death-dealing armaments held necessary as a protective shield against the putative enemy. Projection plays a part here: because militarism bespeaks the nation's own integral aggressiveness, obviating the stigma requires imputing the phenomenon to others, as if to say, outside exigencies or threats requires *us*, in the effort to preserve our own freedom, to respond in kind, only—in the name of democracy—on a grander scale. Thanatos hovers like a dark cloud over the mental landscape of a society that commits to expansion, hegemony, ideological and cultural superiority, all of which have been interlaced with ethnocentrism, itself a unifying agency for the three, and in its own right honing them into a cult of strength which seeks out the presumed nobility of war. Aside from the obvious utility of making war a surrogate for social reform at home, and the permanent state of war (the Obama-Brennan doctrine that has been enunciated, among the coterie of national-security advisers, to rationalize the armed drone campaign, featuring constantly revised hit lists to ensure longevity and continuity of the program) the locus for habituating the people to an acceptance of security as the chief, if not exclusive, function of the State, the disposition to think in terms of war, intervention, militarism, is informed by an inward irresistible allure of inflicting as well as feeling pain. Welcome America, to sadomasochism in full throttle, part and parcel of the self-chosen militaristic framework, the collective death-wish always at the perimeter.

Step-by-step, we see looming in the Ibsenian revelation the psychodynamics of fear, fear of dissent, on the conscious plane, fear of disclosure, cowardice, but mostly, the participation in a lie, on the unconscious plane, leading the individual, who is lacking the resources of moral courage and the spirit of confrontation, to deliquescing into a pool of lethargy, or more apt, passiveness. American political life exalts compromise (the ideological dodge for enforcing the status quo), which, in this discussion, refers to the attitude of going-along: condoning war crimes—not even perceived as such—in the name of the National- Security State, likewise the commission of assassination authorized at the top levels of government, and of course the defense budget, which dwarfs all social-welfare expenditures and leaves the people to fend for themselves in a deteriorating state. The ruling groups—political, economic, military, singly and conjoined—could not be more pleased; for them, societal paralysis (on a continuum with passiveness, but itself appearing more and more likely) is the new end-game, an eschatological Nirvana devoutly to be wished by them so that they can continue with their secrets, notably, enlarging the scope and magnitude of abuse to the point that it becomes no longer detectable, and rather, simply the new *normality*. Yet, a selective Nirvana, for while the masses sleep the sleep of oblivion to reality, ruling

groups remain as busy as ever, their appetites whetted by the subservience and lack of opposition facing them—a happy hunting ground of exploitation.

In this structural-psychological context of mental conformity to the established order, the individual, as in Ibsen's play, or in Shirley Jackson's 1948 *New Yorker* short story, "The Lottery," shields his/her eyes from the truth, falls comfortably into the collective mindset (guilt suitably assuaged through cultural reinforcement) about the evil into which all participate, and perfect the art of *silence* as the means of perpetuating that evil, for Ibsen, contamination of the baths due to toxic wastes flowing from the tannery, for Jackson, the ritual sacrifice of a human being, the person stoned to death by the community, to ensure prospects of a good harvest, in which case, for both Ibsen and Jackson, recovery follows, moving from capitulation to celebration.

Celebration, however, is ephemeral (or rather, skin-deep), a cankerous malignancy of the soul because of the obvious succumbing to crowd pressure which one buries deeply within—perhaps, just perhaps, the psychodynamics of *political catharsis*, the necessary purification allowing the individual complicity and denial simultaneously, so that stoning Tessie Hutchinson or repudiating Thomas Stockmann is good for the community, a patriotic act, so therefore blameless and time to move on. Sound at all familiar in America, from at least 1945 on? Thus, celebration hangs on an imposed complicity (which the individual subject to cultural pulverization willingly accepts), so that if normality equals the status quo, it comes at a price: self-betrayal, in the sense that blocking from consciousness the secret which could expose the evil to which all through their silence have consented, results in a state of dissociation, the individual separated from self, others, community, on one level, falsely integrated on another, leaving a rather pitiful figure, one whose passiveness and lack of political consciousness is not surprising.

This dissociation fictionalizes reality into what ruling groups proffer for domestic consumption: the mythopoeia of freedom, itself closely following the principles of market fundamentalism, meant to displace all recognition of class dominance, the priority assigned to capital accumulation, the acceptance of a still more magnified National-Security State. Both metaphorically, and for some, actually, Rousseau's bold statement about Man everywhere in chains, as highlighting the emptiness of freedom when not supported by requisite institutional foundations (themselves, of course, still open to debate—although neither massive surveillance nor targeted assassination is among them), is on point concerning the individual's manipulation and resulting psychological costs, therefore, of humbling oneself to moral-mental enslavement in accepting the conceits and deceptions of power, which remain carefully hidden. Sadly, the individual is ill-prepared to perceive his/her alienation. Political consciousness is suspect, moral consciousness doubly so.

The idea of a return to the status quo—the fruits of complicity—is misleading in one respect: actually, the status quo is a *dynamic* condition, not only because it requires the full arsenal of societal repression (including the soft glove of public relations) to hold the line, but also because, with each successive commitment to complicitous behavior, the screws tighten more, the escape routes are better covered, a rigidity of punitive law and ideological closure are raised a further notch. For both Ibsen and Jackson, the celebration, based on the respective communities having paid their dues to good citizenship, is false consciousness via internalizing the ruling societal myths, which are themselves the window-dressing for stabilizing the inequities of power. Transitioning to a seeming recovery involves first accepting acquiescence to these myths as a public, even moral, virtue; in the process one becomes anesthetized to human suffering, until finally, habituated to

falsehood and/or denial, one passes beyond guilt, even uncertainty, into the glory of a patriotic sunset.

Thomas Stockmann and Tessie Hutchinson, our respective protagonists, one, by his protest, the other, by her death, acting as lone individuals in the uneven struggle each faces against the collective qua conformist mentality, reveal a *heroism* which is central to the writers' purpose: the penetrating critique of authoritarianism, the opposition to complicity with evil, the expression of conviction essential to human potentiality, all in contrast to the moral void of the collective mentality strongly implied in their writings, a moral void then filled by a spiritual dread of breaking the mold of psychological closure and thereafter reaching out to a free existence. Denial is a paramount trait of the acquiescent person, whose fear of *life* itself, in particulars, truth, reality, compassion, whatever is, in a better world, an affirmation of humanity, has to be beaten out of the individual to ensure the stability and security of ruling-groups' power. The individual is as much the battleground, to be crushed, as is the enemy further afield. In sum, denial is a reactive formation, a built-in shield, that prevents the anguish of self-discovery, thereby allowing one to take the easy way out (Ms. Jackson's community involvement in ritual sacrifice, of which present-day examples abound!) and accounting for the elephant's disappearance while standing in plain sight (e.g., militarism, intervention, defense budgets). This disappearance in the mist of false consciousness is a psychological construction essential, as a basic process, not only to militarism, but also capitalism, its founding source in America, in which, whether as built-in shield or multiple screens, it prevents the penetration of alternatives—ideas, values, modes of structural organization—into the psyche.

Permit me a mixed metaphor: militarism is the stalking horse for the elephant, not the elephant itself. True, militarism has flourished under all sorts of ideological banners, but, except in purported democracies, it has been undisguised, a thing-in-itself, hardly an "elephant in the room," and rather, an object of pride or derision yet clearly visible. In this instance, America takes the cake for hypocrisy, primarily, I think, because professions of peace allow its own capitalist system the benefit of the doubt in the pursuit of aggressive unilateral expansionism (think, humanitarian intervention, better still, a Nobel-Laureate president who is proficient in the ways of assassination), and more directly, the willful neglect—with military power serving as the necessary pretext—on ideological grounds of starving the social safety net so as to keep the lower classes on their good behavior: the Damoclean sword of poverty impending, and with it the loss of collective-bargaining rights, should the principles of trickle-down economics and class-stratification of the social order be endangered. What is invisible, proves most consequential: a System, seemingly autonomous and automatic, as in the self-generation of beneficent outcomes and egalitarian ideology, depends for its security and continued operation on the *legitimation of force*, at best, along with the narcotized impulsion toward consumerism, neither of which breaks the surface of consciousness, thus yielding, analogous to the effects of militarism, the same passivity—politically, the acquiescent citizen.

When we flesh out capitalism as the primordial elephant in the room, that which is taken for granted, encourages silence in the face of destructive, injurious practice—Ibsen's public baths, Obama's entire conservation and environmental policies—, so fills out the individual's mental space as to be invisible, yet responsible for social conditioning and social discipline, then we begin to sense the full proportions of the alienation characterizing the body politic, from the dissociated self to the welcoming response toward the nation's war-making prowess and record of counterrevolution, intervention, and—as with Snowden—just plain international bullying. Denial is

the road to aggression in the name of peace. But wait! It's important to see that putting all one's analytic eggs in the basket of militarism detracts attention from capitalism, which, point-for-point, engenders the same psychological process of denial, and, as part of alienation, provides its own peculiar intensification to the operant paralysis of the individual. (Here I earnestly recommend Fritz Pappenheim's *The Alienation of Modern Man* [Monthly Review Press, 1959], to whom and which I remain personally indebted.)

Denial, not as in austerity, but as fleeing from the truth, is integral to the capitalist world view, for how else rationalize exploitation as puristic development and the inevitable course of history? American capitalism, in its guise as Exceptionalism, literally, however, gets away with murder, and by that I mean, not the casualties of war, but the truncated human spirit, in which commodity fetishism depersonalizes, by trumping, the human sensibility of wholeness, in favor of self-definition centered on possession and ownership—the human, one-sided, and to that extent deformed, a willing receptacle for the goodies on offer through the consumer-propaganda of advertising. For Marx human deformation runs deeper in capitalism, and, I would argue, runs deeper still in America, because the commodity has been enshrined as the holy grail of democratic society. Exchange value is the norm (not *use* value), so that everything becomes a commodity, labor power—in exchange for a wage—and the human being per se, whose worth is determined by the market. We discover our humanity, as Marx would say, in the *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*, through and in our products (which themselves absorb our identities leaving us emptied of self), and therefore ripe for easy pickings in both the accommodation to power and the social blindness required for systemic preservation and expansion.

Yet beyond the commodity-structure both of economic and human relationships (the latter in which persons cannot relate to each other as whole beings, looking instead for a what's-in-it-for-me opportunity, thus ensuring fragmentary encounters with only a part of our beings), there is the all-important *fragmentation* of oneself as a natural consequence of commodity fetishism, precisely the psychodynamics found in the case of the “elephant in the room,” whereby one practices self-deception as a way of circumventing reality and moral standards of conduct in order at every turn to avoid the unthinkable governing one's own society, and the unthinkable of self-castration in the face of provocation. Nevertheless, whether elephant (capitalism) or stalking horse (the military-factor), the two are historically, structurally, and ideologically in a symbiotic relationship—if not actually inseparable, the distinction being that of antecedent and consequent, a relationship important to keep straight for explanatory purposes if one seeks the underpinnings of America's power-base and unilateral strivings for global hegemony.

Capitalism is the starting point for any discussion of the American nation-state, now, National-Security State, which adds to conventional political structure the elements of secrecy, surveillance, torture, intervention, paramilitary forces, espionage, all of which, along with more, add up to, not a single elephant, *but the whole trumpeting herd*, in characterizing the “room” or US mindset. Each element—let's add to that, an hierarchical class system of great disparities in wealth and power, concentrated business and banking organization not subject to regulation in the general interest, and the failure to confront societal problems from climate change to unemployment and urban decay—like militarism itself, qualifies for elephantine status, i.e., taking up psychological space possessing meaning of sufficient vigor as to its inadequate or nonexistent realization, or, for militarism and military force, its overwhelming drain on national resources and decay of the national commitment

to democracy, that for personal salvation and sanity one flies into the arms of denial. The elephant then disappears, like capitalism itself; societal problems do not, and perhaps never did, exist.

Capitalism is adept at playing tricks for its own survivability, in this case its ability to project *each* of these elements, like so many elephants, into the room preempting the mental space, so that secrecy, torture, espionage, etc., or climate change, urban decay (Detroit announced bankruptcy today), deregulation, receive at most passing attention and add fuel to the fires of denial, therefore ensuring that the capitalist system evokes little or no criticism. Each of its elements takes on the grandiosity of the whole, and enjoys the same rights of disappearance. If capitalism, militarism, any element of a critical nature were made known, the structural-cultural narcotic of submissiveness might wear off, anathema to a nation and economic framework counting on the dulling of mental-moral clarity as the needed preparing ground for examining and remaking societal institutions not subject to secrecy, surveillance, or decay. In that event, individuals would be able to identify and act on moral choices, however unpopular or hurtful.

What is at stake, if I understand Ibsen, is resistance to—forgive my neologism—the massification of consciousness. We have seen, in recent years especially, what is real and what is moral both becoming *unthinkable*, to be put out of mind, and hence, the spirit of let the good times roll, to wit, unimpeded militarism *and* capitalism, intervention and deregulation and so, increasingly, the disconnection, political and mental alike, between a capitalism-militarism symbiosis in its voracious demands and the objective welfare of society. What remains is, draining the national wealth in this way ensures the martial glorification of America's global mission, inseparable from, even before the latest reification of the military spirit, a sustained posture of world counterrevolution, and with it, Obama's escalation of the National-Security State for the advancement of both capitalism and its forcible implementation on the global stage—the belching fire of a Leviathan having no scruples.

Still, focusing on capitalism, one must not regard militarism as a negligible factor. They work together in inducing conformity, the latter because of the self-evident disproportionate allocation of force in society, which, more than a macrocosm of Stockmann's townspeople, gives literal meaning to the awesomeness of power—here the capacity for inspiring terror, and not only ostracism—that reduces persons to bended knee (disguised once more as patriotic celebration). It can be said that the bigger the armed forces, the more brazen their interventions, the more cynical the disregard of, and freedom to reinterpret, international law, then the greater the internalization of social discipline, which ideologically and necessarily includes as well an unsparing devotion to capitalism.

Finally, I suggest, there are as many elephants in the room as American capitalism chooses to *hide*, their trumpeting hiding from sight and sound cries of the victims, here and abroad. Nuclear stockpiles, a global network of military bases, drone warfare, regime change, joint maneuvers, astronomical defense budgets, CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, each vying for elephantine status, so as to continue without public scrutiny, and, in the nation itself, deniability as to policies and practices for the sole purpose of protecting and further enriching already superrich individuals and corporate units. (Today, Morgan, Chase announced practically unparalleled profits—to no one's surprise, as the expected norm to be accompanied by public deference.) The various elephants, relying on political amnesia, crowd together absorbing all the oxygen in the room, leaving none for the people in their *democratic* existence, so that law, politics, culture, the Constitution itself, bear the imprint of institutional and ideological trends and/or practices distinctively reactionary on the slippery slope to fascism. But capitalism is the supreme elephant,

ubiquitous and prevailing, now invisible, buttressed by a defensive-reaction formation reducing even skepticism, much less, criticism, to treasonous conduct: a solipsistic universe of patriotic Americanism, leaving the dissident feeling unclean and unwelcome. The trade-off? None worth the candle, only the sadistic thrill of wreaking violence on others, and the world of goodies—no questions asked—in which *commodity fetishism* renders consumerism next to God, the holy of holies.

JULY 22, 2013

### **Obama, Trayvon Martin and the Zimmerman Verdict**

The verbatim transcript of Obama's unscheduled appearance at the White House news briefing revealed all the human warmth of dead mackerel wrapped in yesterday's paper. As one who saw the rawness of racial murders in the South a half-century ago, I was struck by the insipidity of Obama's examples of discrimination against young black men—being followed in department stores, doors clicking shut in autos at their approach, women in elevators nervously clutching their purses. And his remedies? Let's round up celebrities to popularize ideas of racial tolerance, etc. Not a word on the necessity for the democratization of the social order, so that the young of all races could find steady jobs; not a word on the flatout push for military engagement, the gratuitous killings from targeted assassination (his and John Brennan's signature weapon), which legitimate violence at the highest levels of government; not a word on shrinking a humongous military budget, to provide funds instead for education, health care, effective measures to address climate change and pollution from nuclear and other waste products, in sum, an attack on racial injustice not through contrived piety, but programs, policies, regulations which contribute to the reconstruction of American cities, which face down and route the gun zealots, which create trust in government by altogether ceasing the contrived atmosphere of counterterrorism and its abuses of massive surveillance and instilling suspicion of dissident voices. By that token, Obama rather than curbing racial tensions actually intensifies them by directly and indirectly fostering a System based on the widest differentiation between classes affecting wealth and power in recent US history—obscene capital accumulation, increasing destitution.

Racial justice is a nonstarter in a social structure of objective class divisions, nor a political culture supportive of inequality in all things, including but not confined to race. Obama, I have said before, is a grave disappointment as the first American black president—if I were blunt, I would say, a traitor to his race, when judged by men I deeply admire, starting with Paul Robeson, Dr. King, A. Phillip Randolph, and including the civil rights workers who earned their stripes to speak out, not Obama and his *vitae item* as community organizer. Why, grave disappointment? Because those who have fought for racial justice, blacks and whites, transcended race as itself a phony emotional obstacle to genuine societal transformation. And yes, blacks in particular, knowing oppression in America first hand, not Obama's puny slights, have the experience and perhaps even moral obligation to champion ALL underprivileged and be heard.

Obama disgraces his color by his cunning, vacillation, outsized personal ambition, in refusing to speak out until now—when he realized, along with his political advisers, that this is a hot-button issue which might redeem him in the eyes of the more disillusioned segment of the black community (too many blacks, practicing racial solidarity, have shown a false consciousness to the

real issues, those addressed by Dr. King in his Poor People's Campaign, and for which Obama has only shown contempt. His tear shed over Trayvon Martin would be better believed if he had not personally authorized the killing of countless children in far-off lands through signature drone strikes. His legacy shall be not a champion of human freedom, but a rather ordinary politician with blood on his hands.

My *New York Times* Comment (July 20) on its editorial discussing Obama's remarks follows:

When Pres. Obama stated, "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago," or conversely, he could have been Trayvon Martin, he unwittingly put global millions in an uncomfortable position. No one wishes Mr. Obama dead (the thought liberated from that statement), but global millions, myself included, would like to see him leave office, whether by resignation or impeachment, but IN DISGRACE, in disgrace for his political treachery: his personal authorization of targeted assassination, his ties to Wall Street and posture of deregulation, his compulsive obsession with secrecy, and now, the horrid policy of mass surveillance, his diplomatic aggressiveness, as in the Pacific-first geostrategic framework of containing and isolating or weakening China, his chumminess with the military and intelligence communities, resulting in a CIA-JSOC green light for mounting paramilitary operations worldwide, his bullying of China and Russia in the Snowden Affair, bringing those two powers closer together, and not least, his utter lack of warmth, the appearance referred to having all the spontaneity of a TV serial (was Ben Rhodes his speechwriter on this occasion?)—in sum, a president whose legacy will be, not an improvement in race relations, still less, constructive action on job creation and mortgage foreclosure to help the poor of all races, but simply, Terror Tuesdays, hit lists, encouragement of federal workers to spy on each other—a reprehensible contempt for civil liberties.

JULY 24, 2013

### **Obama's Fanaticism Over Secrecy, Surveillance and Repression**

If the US were not engaged in actions and policies that are illegal, immoral, aggressive, war-provoking, and therefore, it is fair to say, *evil*, the issue of leaks would never arise, there being no rhyme or reason for them and the increasingly widening effects of government's stringent, escalating, and still counting, countermeasures, for suffocating a public consciousness of wrongdoing through a campaign of massive surveillance in order to prevent further revelations and ensure continued societal blindness to, and even the endorsement of, interventions, assassinations, cyberwarfare, indefinite detentions, a global system of military bases poised for purposes of internal espionage leading to regime change, the enforcement of a favorable climate for trade, investment, and the extraction of resources, and much else which can be subsumed under the heading of national self-interest (always taken for granted and non-negotiable), all in violation, or skirting the edges, of international law, itself largely crafted to serve American needs, and implemented largely through active support of world financial institutions, trading blocs, military organizations, of essentially kept nations seemingly anxious to do our bidding. With a framework like *that*, no wonder the desire to keep the lid on. Secrecy is not a nervous twitch, nor an excess of zeal in the promotion of a misconstrued American Innocence (saving the world for democracy, humanitarian interventionism, or similar self-advantaged formulas), but a central enabling mechanism in the use of power, primarily military-oriented, for ends capitalistic and nationalist encompassed in a single

system defining the US's Exceptionalist drive for unilateral dominance of the global structure. Ideology alone doesn't do the job (it never did!), nor do exports magically traverse the sea lanes, greeted at foreign ports with hosannas; capitalism is a fractionated international order, inclined to trade rivalries and the forcible settlement of differences. War determines outcomes, and in turn requires the regimentation of thought on the home front. Obama's fanaticism about secrecy is therefore perfectly reasonable and rational, if one happens to subscribe to ruling-groups' ends (along with an added dash of sadism, which he applies by diverting resources from a sound social safety net to satisfy the military appetite) of a government-assisted unrestrained capitalism, government itself, of course, simultaneously invisible in its subventionary function while whipped in place unmercifully when performing any sort of welfare or ameliorative function.

Secrecy is the ideal camouflage for surrounding, covering, and protecting the class-state, its system of power, its elites' hidden agenda, and the political-cultural mechanisms which engineer consent to the national purpose as defined from above, not so much to hide ordinary hanky-panky—favoritism to contractors, political contributors, etc.—but *war crimes* real time, which seldom result in the internal democratization of the offending power, and instead contribute to wealth-and-power differentiation among the populace, which bears the brunt of such policies, whether drafted to fight in wars to enforce US capitalist objectives or placed in vulnerable positions domestically so as not to be in position to press for systemic reforms (essentially moderate, as measured by democratic theory and practice) such as the demand for collective bargaining rights, freedom of expression, and the curbing of the maldistribution of wealth. For capitalism, especially in America, where political and economic democracy are disconnected so that pro forma electoral freedom coexists with corporate monopolization and the concentration of wealth, the ballot box somehow becomes an exhaustive remedy for ruling groups' hegemonic purposes abroad and the instilling of institutional-cultural docility at home. These goals are mutually dependent; one cannot be fulfilled without the other. Which suggests that a pattern of convergence is in process of formation, secrecy providing the bridge, or better, connecting rod, between foreign intervention and domestic surveillance, now becoming conflated into a singular mode of repression intended to bring into question, amenable to prosecution, whatever is considered to be politically-economically-militarily unacceptable, whether this means questioning *either* domestic or foreign policy and activity, with each sharing the other's identity, and no doubt soon, degree of penalization.

In this light, a radical, whose social protest extends beyond the aforementioned moderate demands of the reformer (themselves stopping short of systemic overhaul, but nonetheless worth contesting in the absence of their achievement), is in the cross-hairs of a government unused to substantive criticism in either the domestic- or foreign-policy realms, hence under Obama the acceleration of countermeasures to stifle—again, the import of surveillance, even as a dark shadow making individuals think twice about holding, still less communicating, suspicious thoughts—a potentially awakened political consciousness, “awakened” given the Snowden and Manning Revelations on a unified US government pressing the total integration of military, capitalistic, and geostrategic assumptions, and behind that, the integration as well of structure, ideology, and policy making, to the end of maximizing State power both in its own right and the better to promote and service the political economy of capitalism, nay, an advanced mode of capitalism facing the strains of a changing, now multipolar, context of international politics. Gaps in the integrative process leave room, i.e., mental space, for popular resistance through the perception of the forced joining of parts, integration as per se repression, whereby everything must be brought into conformity with an



homogenous composition of forces focused on promoting expansionist-aggressive systemic tendencies (particularly the mature stage of capitalism warns of senility, and therefore, the resort to extreme measures even to remain in place) while also promoting silence and/or complicity at home. In this way, intervention (and with it, targeted assassination, regime change, global political and economic influence, counterrevolution as a generalized posture) neatly dovetails with surveillance (and the further splintering of traditional civil liberties, presumably mandated by a counterterrorism policy), so that when we return to the radical, be it on either front, the lines between foreign and domestic “criminal” activity is starting to blur—the further conflation, facing the individual directly, so that our hypothetical whistleblower of the future in whichever realm is left open to the charge of *treasonous* conduct, as indeed is being contemplated or already decided with respect to Snowden and Manning.

The preceding overview, especially the overall convergence of structure, ideology, and policy, transcending narrow fields of operation, or boundaries of scope and practice (e.g., the CIA, contrary to its charter, is as much an operational as intelligence force, and perhaps as much involved in domestic as in foreign theaters of activity), speaks to Obama’s elaboration, inheriting much of, thence adding still more to, the work of his predecessors dating from the immediate aftermath of the Second World War through his own presidency, of a Secretive, National-Security, Militarized State, whose monolithic façade is beginning to seriously break down, thanks in equal parts to overextension unsupported by sufficient political-economic (but not military) resources, a globalization process, ostensibly American-led yet actually witnessing the dispersion of power, with China and Russia independent centers, and peripheral nations, like Brazil, shaping into no-longer dependent industrializing countries, and finally, in a by no means exhaustive listing, the revelations themselves, in which, to Obama, Snowden is the Anti-Christ, and Manning, the Mephistophelian figure, upsetting expectations of an hypostatized democratic leadership phony in fact from the start. Thus, with cracks showing in Leviathan’s armor, matters are tensing up; Obama is getting antsy. The heavy-handed, until now still secretive, program of surveillance, which I initially took to be a means for scaring Americans into regimented, compliant mode, actually also is unwitting admission on the part of Obama, the National-Security State, and Authority in general of an unremitting *fear* at the top as well, both that the tightly coiled structure of power is becoming unstuck, and that as layer upon layer of obfuscation is cleared away it will be seen that our political and military high-and-mighty trusted leaders, i.e., themselves, are merely run-of-the-mill war criminals. Certainly, armed drones for targeted assassination, as one example, must have crossed their minds, if not troubled their sleep, that international-law violations stood on the horizon. Nor did waterboarding comport well with democratic leadership, *nor* mass surveillance and data mining, *nor* indefinite detention, *nor* a 1000-and-1 daily favors to American business, banking, and industry, which makes the infliction of suffering on others worthwhile.

Turning, then, to the highlights of surveillance, just as occurring over the last few days (for anyone who questions the importance of Snowden, this heightened government activity, generously termed damage control, should put the issue to rest, for his revelations had and will continue to have an implosive force showing a central core naked of moral scruple, the vacuum to be filled with capitalist-military strivings for undisputed global power), I must quickly note that, first, counterterrorism has been the screen for the preliminaries of internal regimentation for some time (an implicit domestic antiradicalism gained through creating a climate of superpatriotism—present already, though less organized—and obedience to regulations designed to stimulate respect for

emergency powers and the whole concept of prevailing danger, and second, Obama is not a Johnny-come-lately to the use of repression, with purported threats from outside serving as a rationale, for we see from the earliest days of his administration the smooth transition from Bush II, with no inner qualms publicly manifested, that appeared to many—myself also fooled—as mere political inertia, when in reality it represented a purposeful, *vital* continuity which, in short order, blossomed into a full-scale qualitative escalation, so that by 2011 at the latest he had in place the secrecy-element, the determined prosecution of whistleblowers (under Bush there were no successful convictions, or even cases reaching that stage), a National-Security Team second-to-none in its interventionist, war-making, brook-no-opposition, at home or abroad, proclivities, in sum, a newly-articulated design and framework in which the intervention-surveillance duopoly was ready to spring forward in writing a new chapter in American capitalist-military expansion.

Ah, the Aspen Security Forum, an annual event: we think of Tea Party nutcakes running around decrying big government, when it is the “respectables,” in such meetings as this, who represent the thinking and planning of Pentagon officials and interested citizens (aka, defense contractors, war-inspired think-tank fellows, consultants and lobbyists of every stripe anxious to push their ideological agendas and/or their military hardware and products), who are the aspirant, more sophisticated, better connected, and thus more dangerous power-wielders, adjuncts of, and sometimes, as now, members in good standing of, a practically-speaking ruling class of capitalist-military-(and slightly to the side) economic elites, whose names, such as General Keith B. Alexander, head of NSA, and Ashton B. Carter, from Harvard professor to deputy secretary of defense, need to be fleshed out and made familiar. An unfailing barometer for determining the national-defense/national-security atmosphere, the Forum, last Thursday (July 18), bore witness to the Snowden Phenomenon, forcing a scrambling around to maintain the machinery of war—here, the magnification of cyberwar in the nation’s arsenal—and the continued institutionalization of government secrecy, both signifying a further convergence of unitary purpose. Sanger and Schmitt write in the *New York Times* on the 18th that NSA “has imposed new rules designed to sharply restrict the sharing and downloading of top-secret material from its computer networks” following Snowden, as related by “two of the Pentagon’s most senior officials” at the Forum that day. Discussing the “two-man rule,” applied to the handling of nuclear weapons (“two computer systems administrators [working] simultaneously when they are inside systems that contain highly classified material”), Alexander said that in future “the most sensitive data” will be put “in a highly encrypted form” and made limited in accessibility, to prevent its being moved “throughout the nation’s intelligence agencies and the Defense Department.”

So far, pretty obvious. Alexander defended massive surveillance, his “You need a haystack to find a needle” statement perhaps vying with George Tenet’s “slam dunk” one for contemporary imbecilic honors, but he redeems himself by revealing for the first time that Obama, soon after taking office, was informed of Bush’s NSA-surveillance operations—specifically “the number of errors the agency made,” which the General termed, according to the reporters, “the inadvertent collection of information about American citizens.” Inadvertent? Here the account becomes intensely interesting. Even Sanger and Schmitt want to get Obama off the hook. Alexander continues: “When the president first came on board, we had a huge set of mistakes that we were working through in 2009. He [Obama] said essentially, ‘I can see *the value of these* [italics, mine], but how do we ensure that we get these within compliance and that everything is exactly right?’” At first, one—and the reporters—think a critical view of the Bush surveillance programs is being

expressed. Yet, Obama's concern is not termination but legitimation, and here he called for an NSA self-policing of its actions, a "directorate of compliance," and subsequently, ensuring the favorable approval of the FISA Court. He did the same with the armed drone for targeted assassination: cover the government's (and his own) rear via in-house legal justifications, including secret White House Counsel memos and secret FISA Court decisions. Inadvertence = legalized criminal activity, whether massive surveillance or killing women and children as "collateral damage."

The Forum breaks further new ground, Alexander and Carter revealing the formalization of cyberwarfare as "a new mission" using "a class of weapons that the Obama administration has rarely discussed in public," with 4,000 military personnel deployed to the Pentagon to start operations. Secrecy, thou art wondrous! Obama "accelerated" Bush's "Olympic Games" program, and then, as the purpose of our whole discussion, instigated (more politely, inaugurated), as here, programs of his own, more elaborate and devastating. From targeted assassination to cyberwarfare, perhaps a *new* signature weapon to which he is committed, with Carter excitedly saying, as proof of its importance (never mind accusations leveled against China in this realm, our Exceptionalism is our badge of honor): "I wanted to start this fast. Fundamentally, we're spending everything we can think about spending intelligently for, notwithstanding our budget hassles, because this is an area we are protecting even as our military capabilities will be cut." Cyberteams are planned, under Alexander's command, a revealing of details of "one of the military's most closely held projects." The focus on teams, "in addition to the N.S.A. work force," enables planning to start from scratch, with the possibility of modeling them after Special Ops units. In all of this, Obama is not a passive onlooker. Make it legit, but make it work: cyberwarfare, another feather in his cap.

On July 19, Charlie Savage reported in *The Times* that the US Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit (Richmond, Va.), by a 2-1 vote, ruled that James Risen of the paper "must testify in the criminal trial" of a former CIA agent "charged with providing him with classified information." The majority opinion held that the First Amendment did not protect a reporter receiving "unauthorized leaks" from divulging his source—a clear test of freedom of the press, and, to the dissenting judge (Savage's paraphrase) "a serious threat to investigative journalism." The judge stated, "The majority exalts the interests of the government while unduly trampling those of the press, and in doing so, severely impinges on the press and the free flow of information in our society." Apparently, the Supreme Court, 40 years before, had delineated a precedent applicable only to grand jury investigations, leaving the issue of trials up in the air; still, the Obama administration (here DOJ) immediately stated, "We agree with the decision," as well they might, for Justice has prosecuted more than twice the number of leak cases under Obama than under previous president's combined. AG Holder, given the criticism over "subpoenaing Associated Press reporters' phone records and portraying a Fox News reporter as a criminal conspirator [a serious charge] in order to obtain a warrant for his e-mails," in response "announced new guidelines for leak investigations," which hardly alters my characterization: Obama's fanaticism about leaks. Risen's case was first tried in a lower court, the decision held in his favor on the ground that he was protected "by a limited 'reporter's privilege'" under the First, the Obama administration then appealing, arguing "that such a reporter's privilege did not exist," and now, on July 19<sup>th</sup>, the Appeals Court *reversed* the decision of the lower court and Risen is compelled to testify or go to jail. The Obama people play hard ball; Risen "has vowed to go to prison," rather than comply.

The flurry of activity of July 18-19 is not happenstance, but a direct response to Snowden, his revelations, and the frustration on Obama's part that he *remains out there*, seeking asylum world opinion on his side and in effect thumbing his nose at the Leviathan. Towering America meets its match; a government that is afraid of its own transparency, is not a democratic government. Slowly the wheels are turning against the US, not just because of the outrage over surveillance, but a proper understanding if not in America then globally that surveillance is not cops-and-robbers child's play but the linchpin of a repressive social order capable of striking out viciously against all who oppose it. Why else surveillance? The momentum continues, so long as Snowden remains free and capable of releasing further documents, fittingly, the fascistic state-secrets doctrine, USG's favorite defense against judicial and/or public oversight, and launching pad for the Obama-Holder-DOJ prosecutions using the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, now being turned inside out and upside down. Stripped of the state-secrets doctrine, i.e., of no avail when the information becomes revealed, America looks quite totalitarian in its pursuit of national policy (and pretty shabby in its need for conformity at home, deference, abroad). Hegemony loses its luster, as do militarism and capitalism, when it is realized by others that US fine pronouncements are the cover for dominance: over the global structure, markets, capital flows, and, the human underside, cheap, docile labor abroad (and increasingly, at home), all predicated on a compliant American public, consumerism their bread-and-circuses to ensure absolute devotion to the System of Enterprise, as meanwhile, the defense budget and the culture of militarization expand. Yes, why else surveillance?

Then, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, another article in the *New York Times*, by Sharon LaFraniere, providing context for the Obamaean (i.e., the whole administration, in military lockstep about self-protection, whether national-security advisers, CIA, Pentagon, FDA, Interior, all having something *to hide*) fanaticism about secrecy—and the president's own frenetic urge to strike out at leakers, masking a profound insecurity about being found out as a potential/actual war criminal, platitudinous leader, and simple careerist. The title of the article, "Math Behind Leak Crackdown: 153 Cases, 4 Years, 0 Indictments," superbly captures the reality, for it refers to the record of the Bush administration, not Obama's, who would strain every muscle to rectify the situation. Once again, in the Bush-Obama relationship, we see, first, overlap and continuity, second, the latter's intensification of policy and program, and third, the progression from intensification to a qualitative leap: Obama on surveillance and prosecutions leaves Bush in swaddling clothes. Here's another name to remember in the White House cast of characters: Dennis C. Blair, Obama's national intelligence director until 2010, who, examining the Bush record (as in the article's title) "was dismayed by what he found." He said it "was pretty shocking to all of us," which led to "a series of phone calls and meetings" with AG Holder to work out "a more aggressive strategy to punish anyone" leaking national-security secrets. Blair put the matter well: "My background is in the Navy, and it is good to hang an admiral once in a while as an example to the others. We were hoping to get somebody and make people realize that there are consequences to this and it needed to stop."

This was precisely the mindset that, subsequent to his comment, would lead to the prosecution (along with solitary confinement) of Manning, and represent administration thinking and policy in the attempt to capture Snowden. But, ironically, it is not "an admiral once in a while," but retired General James E. Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (until mid-summer 2011) who is being investigated for leaking classified information. More on this momentarily, but we see right away the self-devouring nature of surveillance, the passion for secrecy, the fear of leaks—the net is cast ever wider, now a top-ranking general. The reporter, picking up on Blair's remark about

consequences, gives us a convenient summary, including the preceding day's Appeals Court decision: "The Obama administration has done its best to define those consequences, with an aggressive focus on leaks and leakers that has led to more than twice as many prosecutions as there were in all previous administrations combined. It also led to a significant legal victory on Friday when a federal appeals court accepted the Justice Department's argument that the First Amendment *does not protect reporters from having to reveal the sources* suspected of leaking information to them." (Italics, mine) So much for Obama's respect for the First Amendment and for freedom of the press.

Whether, as the reporter, citing "present and former government officials," claims the focus on leaks at the highest levels of the administration "was driven by pressure from the intelligence agencies and members of Congress," or the reverse, Obama's desire to prove himself in spirit one of the former and to placate conservatives and war hawks of both parties of the latter, the fact remains that he has drawn very close to the CIA (and CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations) and the Democratic head of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Dianne Feinstein, has carried water for him in demanding the zealous prosecution of leakers, chastising in closed hearings, as early as 2009, Holder, Blair, and FBI Director Mueller, for not doing enough. To critics of the Manning-Snowden revelations (Snowden incidentally acknowledged Manning as a source of inspiration), things were getting out of hand; secrecy must be preserved in the national interest and at all costs. To critics of the critics, perhaps, with the Cartwright case, things are getting out of hand the other way (a distinctly minority view, both in government and the nation as a whole, sold on national security as the holy of holies). In his case, it was revelation of Obama's new love—cyberwarfare, the attack on Iran's nuclear program, that brought him to Coventry courtesy the DOJ. (The case against Risen of The Times also had to do with his revealing information about Iran, "a covert operation to deceive" its nuclear scientists.) Cartwright, though, by definition, "represents an escalation of effort," in the reporter's words, compared with previous prosecutions of officials, never above mid-level in ranking, and in the words of a member of the Federation of American Scientists, "The Cartwright case stands alone. It is a sign that the administration is not backing off its anti-leak crusade. It is still going full-tilt."

Putting all of this together, Ms. LaFraniere also discusses administration procedural matters, such as DOJ imposition of "a tight deadline to decide whether to open criminal inquiries into leaks, shortening to just three weeks a review process that had often dragged on for months," one finds overwhelming support for the idea that Obama's actions have had a chilling effect on public scrutiny of all areas of government, a tightening both of rhetoric and practice, in which surveillance, prosecution, condemnation of divulging documents pointing to illegality and worse, indicate to me the advent of fascism in America. The term "fascism" should not be bandied about. I think it fits structurally (the high degree of concentration in the economic sector, along with the more significant marker, the interpenetration government and business), militarily (not only aggressive conduct of foreign policy, but the militarization of capitalism), culturally (a profound disregard for the valuing of equality, whether in race relations or in deference shown business, political, and military leaders as part of an hierarchical ordering of economic and social relations), and now, more overt signposts, as seen above, when a government resorts to massive surveillance, to hide its dirty linen. A fitting close to these thoughts can be found in the excellent article by Carlos Borrero in today's (July 23) *CounterPunch*, when he writes: "Systematic surveillance can only be understood as an essential part of state repression, the purpose of which is to intimidate those that question the

status quo by promoting a culture of fear. One can never be separated from the other.” His reference is to US repression of anticolonist forces in Puerto Rico, yet the statement is equally valid for America (that which has been inflicted on the exploited comes back with equal force to the exploiter, fearful his pathological quest for dominance will someday prove his undoing). If further indictment of Obama and the liberalization of militaristic capitalism to make it palatable to the American people is required, I cite the drone campaign for targeted assassination, a scenario for permanent war—the advent (arrival on the scene) of fascism, dressed in the fashion of humanitarian interventionism and domestic *silence* concerning the atrocities practiced at home, on the poor and the dissidents of every stripe and persuasion.

JULY 26, 2013

### **The NSA is the Spearhead for American Fascism**

The House on July 24 defeated a motion to restrict, but not abandon, National Security Agency massive-surveillance activities, the Obama administration and Democratic leadership in the House in solid support of continuance, this despite the obvious totalitarian implications and consequences of the program. Think of it, POTUS identified closely with the most alarming violation of American civil liberties in recent history, placing him in the same crowd with Joe McCarthy, A. Mitchell Palmer, the Alien-and-Sedition forces going back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a dishonorable pantheon of those contemptuous of freedom of thought, privacy of the individual, safeguards inherent in the Constitution for protection against unlawful searches and seizures. By this vote, is there any doubt that the Democratic Party is aligned with the Republicans in decisive areas of public policy, beginning, for these purposes, with the support of counterterrorism as the pretext for shaping internal consensus on the military foundations of global superiority with respect to conjoined armed power and capitalist penetration of world markets? Neither party qua party dissociates itself from the flagrant abuses and atrocities, epitomized in the program of armed drones for targeted assassination, that are *integral* to the unilateral position—still in effect, but rapidly deteriorating as the complexion of the international system changes to a multipolar context, especially with China’s rise and broad-based Third World industrial growth—of superpower in extremis (i.e., the US view of top-dog, on pain of death otherwise, an internal domino theory justifying barbarism at any cost).

The House vote nails down the truth: Obama’s legacy, contrary to his economic shadow-boxing these days purportedly aimed at “middle class” improvement, is one of consistent support of militarization of capitalist expansion, including, via banking and corporate deregulation, the monopolistic consolidation of the business system, but also the wider *correlative setting*, a quiescent populace, ready for thought control (as in surveillance), nonchalance, to such threats as climate change, environmental degradation, pollution from multiple sources, associated with nuclear wastes, mining, fracking, etc., and a readiness to intervention, support for the military of “friends and allies,” espionage on behalf of regime change, and presently at center stage, ambitious plans for the conduct, greater than before, of cyberwarfare. This bill of goods, shoddy, soiled, infested with lice, from a moral standpoint, requires for success the Big Sell, the Obama full-court press, borne out by the expansion of Executive Power and the coordination of previously (under his predecessors) lax efforts at integration, notably, the military shift in emphasis to paramilitary operations, as the type-form for reorganizing and improving the efficiency of the aggressive posture of the United States—all without sacrifice to the bulkier manifestations of power, as in moving

significant units, air and naval, to the Pacific in incipient yet more pointed confrontation with China, as the new perceived antagonist in a reviviscence of the Cold War.

NSA surveillance, now giving the Agency growing pride of place as the administration darling, partially replacing the CIA—and its joint activities with JSOC—as the instrument of choice in furthering America’s national interest, is intended to be more than a temporary measure to preserve government secrecy like never before, except maybe, for more justifiable reasons, in World War II, and *then*, not going beyond military operations (loose lips sink ships) to the blanket coverage of Americans’ private lives, and instead becomes—in Obama’s eyes, and that of his national-security advisers—a permanent state of affairs, on the theory that America will always face enemies to “Homeland Security” and, not publicly expressed, the perhaps equal danger of insistence upon transparent government at home. From the Oval Office it is hard to distinguish between al Qaeda and domestic whistleblowers, Snowden and Manning openly conceived as dangerous traitors. What a mess, we’ve allowed ourselves to get into: robbed from above by an irresponsible capitalist system bent solely on profit-taking, terrorized by a “liberal” government decked out in glittering generalities whose test of proper citizenship is silence in the face of its illegal ways abroad and business favoritism at home, castrated in mounting social protest (never mind the flowers, where did all the demonstrations go?)—a mess of our own making, as when we see Democratic leaders in the House, Pelosi, Hoyer, etc., working to keep the party in line *to defeat curbs* on NSA spying, while Obama’s team mans the phones to ensure the happy results. Legacy? Eichmann on the Potomac, consciously, willingly, part of the vast effort to keep American capitalism, encased in military splendor, on track as the global powerhouse across the political-economic-ideological-military spectrum of what we quaintly refer to as, guardianship of a peaceful world order, except, unlike Eichmann, Obama cannot plead cog-in-the-wheel irrelevance. The power is his, to use wisely or malignantly. I think, the latter.

My *New York Times* Comment (July 25) on the article discussing the vote to defeat the motion on NSA surveillance restrictions follows:

If any liberals and progressives need further convincing that Obama is on the side of authoritarianism and shows absolute contempt for civil liberties, Obama, and much of the Democratic party, this should be convincing. But of course they will not listen. They’ve loved him through targeted assassination, they’ve loved him through national-security advisers bent on traditional hegemony, they’ve loved him through every conceivable betrayal of principle stated or implied in his 2008 campaign, etc.

N.S.A. is the spearhead for an American version of fascism, running neck-and-neck with the CIA-JSOC paramilitary-operation synthesis for that honor. How they support POTUS is beyond me, except as confirmation of bipartisan reaction on fundamental issues.

JULY 31, 2013

### **Race Traitor**

This is a touchy topic. Liberals and progressives of current fashion had best stay away from it or hide under the bed sheets, too those enthralled by political correctness (often the same crowd), for, as I wrote in a *New York Times* Comment (July 29) in response to Bill Keller’s Op-Ed article (same

date), “Profiling Obama,” and actually, not the Comment, but the reply to a hostile reply, and hence, perhaps an overstatement (although on reflection, I don’t think so):

“Defend your man, by all means. I was at Mississippi Freedom Summer, at Selma before the grand march, at a lot of demonstrations—and so, feel I’ve earned my right to criticize Obama as a traitor to the black race, based on having worked with *many courageous blacks who understood, better than he, the meaning of DEMOCRACY.*” (Italics, mine)

This is not a matter of, Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is blackest of us all, as though a popularity contest were underway, but rather a political-ideological-structural question concerning Obama’s own record, and the reasonable historical expectations one has about a first-time-ever black president of the United States. Let’s address the second first. Is it historical-racial profiling to think that, given blacks’ unique position of an underclass in America, enslaved for centuries, discriminated against (still to this day), for many, even in the first-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century placed in Georgia chain-gangs, living in squalid urban slums, unable to claim the most basic rights to citizenship, and to the present day itself living under the cloud of an almost formalized system of *apartheid*, given the realities of income, wealth, power, class stratification, and still greater realities of white-America’s ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and racial fear, thus creating a cultural framework in which the menace of terror (not al Qaeda, but apple-pie rosy-cheeked Americanism) is etched into the black consciousness—not Obama’s superficial examples recently given, entering elevators, white women clutching their purses, etc., but racial crimes, police brutality, raw indignities, well beyond produce clerks looking askance at the purchase of arugula—to have the expectation therefore that the first black president, both to honor that suffering and *rectify* the conditions of discrimination and exploitation, to stand proudly for SOCIAL JUSTICE as the cornerstone of his administration?

Is it asking too much that a first black president recognize, based on the historical experience of his own people (i.e., if he admits to himself that blacks are his own people, and not a political springboard for jumping into politics), that oppression, subjugation, inequality, are bad per se, whomever has to bear their brunt, that racism, applied to blacks, is the generic formula of domination which could be applied to any and all races, not on grounds of color, but *class-grounds* of who holds power, where is it located, what forms it takes, and how transferred or translated through the social system? And with that recognition, as the most elemental test of human decency, regard for humankind, political integrity, *do something, if worthy as a leader, then with every fiber of one’s body work against, rather than joining with, the existing ruling class to advance the interests of all the people!* Is that asking too much? Obama is a traitor to the black race. Period. I reach for my handy Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate, in which the primary definition for traitor is, “one who betrays another’s trust or is false to an obligation or duty.”

We’re not talking about ordinary, average, run-of-the-mill leadership. This is the president. This is the first black president. Betrayal follows him at every step, not simply on race, but on promises made or implied, programs, likewise, which had the potential for freeing and improving the lot of all working people—at least that was the tone of the ’08 campaign and the near-feverish reception to Obama’s Inaugural Address (I like many radicals and civil rights activists, enraptured, near tears, welcoming his and now America’s triumph over bigotry, privilege, militarism). A letdown? Far worse. Our hero’s despisement of all that we foolishly projected onto him, largely—it must be frankly stated—because of the color of his skin. It’s time to remove the protective coloration. A



man must be judged by what he does, in this case, not hide behind his racial identity, which by consciously soft-pedaling, deliberately accentuates it more, while neutralizing its effect on potentially mistrustful whites (not to say, outright bigots, of which there are plenty). Obama walks a fine tightrope, stage-managed to perfection. (We will sincerely miss Axelrod, if in fact he is gone, for his finely-crafted strategems and political genius.) Race is, like capitalism and militarism, one of the elephants in the room, so large as to be invisible, as Obama—given a free pass by Bill Keller, where we started this morning, reflecting the bulk of liberal and centrist opinion-makers—presses forward, always stepping warily (as befitting the man on tightrope) yet in a single direction: away from race altogether, to the facilitation of America's most retrograde features, from the standpoint of a democratic society—its hegemonic ambitions, contemptuous of the rest of the world; its placation of every segment of US ruling groups (a ruling class in all but name, and with some marginal friction among its members), starting with banking and finance in general, but extending over a wide swath of corporate-monopolistic America, e.g., oil, defense, nuclear power, chemicals (Monsanto presently eating a lot of news print), pharmaceuticals, an assortment of wealth-concentration soaring to the heavens; its fascistic (no other word is appropriate in the circumstances) and insatiable demand for the social control of the entire society, founded on an ingrained disposition among political-economic-military elites (shared by POTUS) toward authoritarianism on the suspicion the sky was falling down, that working people, the poor, the disadvantaged would somehow, some day, strike out against them.

Obama at the ready, national-security advisers in tow, the intelligence community literally panting at the new-found opportunities offered by its Friend in the White House to become fully operational, and not just concerned with intelligence, a scene and cast of characters in which he becomes indistinguishable from Bush 2, except only more sophisticated, and for that reason, more destructive on the big-ticket items, China, surveillance, cyberwarfare, and, of course, targeted assassination, all of which he greatly extends, quantitatively and qualitatively, the dangerous policies of his predecessor. Have we forgotten here about race? Why not, for Obama has; he is too busy expanding America's military power abroad, unprecedented surveillance at home. Which leads me to the first concern, not historical expectations of the first-ever black president, but his record as it bears on those expectations, and thereby affects blacks in America. Aside from the coterie of blacks surrounding him—Holder, Rice, Jarrett—all having stellar corporate credentials and/or being highly upwardly mobile, Obama, notwithstanding his curriculum-vita entry phase as community organizer, has had little experience, or knowledge, of, still less, empathy for, predominant black existential problems of living and survival. In public policy he has kept his race apart, not for, what I believe the radical reasoning, the need to transcend race in order to alter social structure as itself a means of elevating all races and ending racial divisiveness. No, he has kept race at arms-length for expedient reasons, as a nonconsequential factor in the solidification of the foundations of monopoly capitalism, militarily buttressed, in America.

What's in *that* for blacks, except via a spurious trickle-down theory and framework of wealth percolating to the bottom strata of the economic order? Taking his policies one-by-one, I find that blacks suffer further degradation because the essential structure of domination, racial and otherwise, is left perfectly intact. Obama's transformative ballyhoo is merely the tightening of class structure, and the ideological burden of invidiousness in all its forms that derives from the establishment and sanctity of privilege and disproportionately affects blacks as low-man on the psychological totem pole as well as source of cheap labor in society. Regulation? Hardly, as every agency of

government, all under Obama's stewardship and therefore watch, through Executive organization, appointments, policy making, has turned its back on the public interest in favor of fending off effective supervision on its behalf, a shield of armor which provides government's protection and bountiful support for the interests presumed to be regulated—not a situation, as in banking, boding well for the lower classes, black and white, as the recent mortgage crisis attests. In every realm of the system, there is more of the same, FDA, SEC, EPA, an alphabet soup, unlike in the New Deal, where the wealthy sup, the poor washing the bowls. Through their assistance, the regulators pound nails into the coffin of the poor, again, disproportionately represented by blacks, who, I believe, here illustrate the proposition that the political economy itself must be *fundamentally* altered if blacks, or others, obviously the white poor included, who compose society's bottom groups, are to achieve decent living and working conditions and a secure place in the legal and political systems.

Precisely because of his arraying the institutions, structure, and policies of America against the poor as such, or through studied *inaction*, allowing problems, many created by the failure to regulate, cumulate, such as those involving climate change, gun control, environmental degradation, I stand by the assertion that Obama is a traitor to the black race—a policy maker of *negativity*, leaving an unjust system exactly in place, in spite of potentialities for the widespread sharing of abundance and the social enrichment of a multiracial culture in which all prosper, and none is neglected. Instead, by leaving an unjust system intact, he reproduces the very structural, economic, ideological, and political forces responsible for the victimization of blacks, and everyone not “privileged” to be part of America's upper crust, including, as mentioned, a clear minority of blacks themselves who have donned the garb and pledged allegiance to a militaristic/monopolistic capitalism committed by a logic of exploitation to keeping blacks *as a race* in a subordinate condition. Treason proves color-blind when elevation to a higher plane of oppression and repression is possible—and, for Obama, actively sought and the mission prosecuted.

AUGUST 6, 2013

### **Toward a Definition of Fascism**

Definitions matter, especially in structural and/or systemic typologies, because imprecision leads to carelessness, obfuscation of repression, lack of support when it is merited, and the clarity necessary both to an acute and active political consciousness and the development of a moral sensibility. The term “fascism” has been bandied about, to the point of losing its sting, its cutting edge, and becoming instead the catch-all for reactionary social movements and political antics of individuals, allowing the more dangerous causal factors, e.g., capitalism, militarism, etc., to remain in shadow or otherwise assumed (and therefore neglected). Fascism comes in many forms; one size does *not* fit all, tempting as such an analysis might be. Nor is there an historical line drawn in the sand, the crossing of which acts to confirm the genuine article. This is not to set up unnecessary hurdles, but merely, to warn against the construction of simplistic models. Indeed, models are a waste of energy; history is a better guide for us.

Fascism's many guises—Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, Hitler's Germany; all are relevant, and perhaps even constituting a unified sequential historical phase. But that isn't good enough, at least to account for the historical forces post-1945, although certainly beginning earlier, which define fascism in modern times. The concentration camp is no longer a sure-fire indicator, not when

techniques of surveillance are being perfected and mass manipulation, particularly via consumerism and political propaganda from all quarters, has taken its place in softening the body politic and inducing conformity and complacency. Today fascism speaks with a mellow voice (except when ruling groups are, or perceive themselves to be, threatened) and dons softened gloves, the better to achieve the regimentation of thought and opinion heretofore reliant on force. Force is externalized, propelled forward to maintain hegemonic aspirations and, on the side, enlist the populace at home into the display of fervent patriotic support, without which the total formation might stagnate, fall backward, or actually crumble. Fascism represents sustainment of the existing structure of wealth and power whilst the political economy itself bounds ahead—that is, *the conservation of the Old Order under the conditions of modern industrialism*.

The old order need not have been feudalism (although a few writers on occasion, Ghent in the US, and more perceptively, if obliquely, Thorstein Veblen, in his book, *Imperial Germany*, have viewed monopoly capitalism as industrial feudalism, and were not terribly wide of the mark), but I maintain that fascism, in a meaningful definition faithful to historical-structural development, would transform capitalism into a permanent Old Order, not to be attacked or dismantled, but modernized, so as to make possible an advanced industrial system with all else frozen—i.e., any impetus to democratization which might be ascribed to technology utterly nullified—and the class structure contained in equilibrium to the same end, prevention of change so long as stratification reflects power at the top and social discipline at the bottom. Fascism = modern industrialism within an hierarchical societal framework. To make such an arrangement work requires bread and circuses, standing behind which is the mailed fist, impersonalized through large military budgets, the martial spirit promoted in sport, ethnocentrism, the engendering of fear, as presently, saturation of the public environment through a political culture of counterterrorism and anti-immigrant sentiment.

The forces of production (I speak of technological change via innovation, not as a mechanistic formula, but as carried historically forward by real people in real social systems) are inherently *dynamic*, even when the progression is not smooth but punctuated by spurts, and although not invariably the vehicles of social, political, economic democratization, these forces outpace the institutional framework in which they are embedded. Ownership, state protection of that status, ideological rationales if not formulated by, then sanctioned and transmitted by, ruling groups, all play a vital part in muting the thrust of their impact on institutions and culture to enlarge consumption (capitalism, as Marx knew, thrives on a state of *underconsumption*, and consequent deprivation of working people through a primordial stage of capital accumulation founded on their impoverishment) and lessen class differentiations. Industrialism, as a pure construct, is not exactly the enemy of capitalism, but it must be brought under control if it is to be advantageous to, and thereby strengthen the conventional markers of, capitalism, from unimpeded wealth-accumulation and ownership-concentration to a disciplined, nonthreatening labor class whose members are in competition with each other for available work at depressed wages. If not brought under control, it may even lead to another societal formation when under more rational management (from the standpoint of public well-being), i.e., the transformation from capitalism to socialism, that which must be resisted at all costs, else the demise of capitalism itself. In this context, especially, fascism saves capitalism from itself, raising it to a condition of political stabilization by which, relying on the State *to absorb its negativity* (whether potential labor militancy or exposure to the outside threat of alternative models of historical-economic development), it is free to pursue the logic of its own internal motion. Stated perhaps too simplistically, fascism is the final stage of capitalism, requiring

advanced-industrial growth to reach and remain on that plateau, but always, by that point, industrialism as the toothless tiger, summoned at the command of the ruling groups in society.

Fascism, too, in the world of international commercial reality, facilitates the emphasis on a militarized political economy and domestically regimented populace. Capitalism no longer could take for granted the pacific consequences of trade per se, when, following World War II, the world system itself was becoming unrecognizable to a Smithian perspective, in light of decolonialism, raw-materials scarcity, the root fact of intracapitalist rivalry for the successful trade-penetration of the markets of the world, along with the equally significant need for profitable investment outlets, lest capital be choked in place. For these and other reasons, we find the militarization of capitalism as representing a qualitative change of organization and direction in which power becomes an end in itself, ideology turns from the prevention of internal dissent to a global posture of counterrevolution (without neglecting the former), and fascism, as the totalized reactive societal formation, is verily multitasked: in order to preserve capitalism it must neutralize industrialism, ensuring it does not interfere with capitalist integuments of class dominance that allow the system to function on behalf of, and as designed by, its ruling groups; it must also place capitalism on a permanent war-footing, not so much for the sake of military Keynesianism (defense industries spelling the margin of difference between stagnation and recovery, between dangerous unemployment and acceptable levels of the same—always as determined, not by a public commitment to full employment, but by capitalism-serving economists who see advantages in a slightly depressed labor market), and instead for the sake of keeping solidly planted on the escalator of hegemonic certitude, over as against other powers within capitalism which have made rapid industrial advances in the last half-century and are competing for the same markets, raw materials, and investment outlets, as well as testing hegemony as against noncapitalist (I have trouble calling them socialist as such) political economies taking the somewhat adventitious form of ideological conflict, the Cold War, now resumed, if it ever ended with Russia, with China, to the mutual advantage of both sides in keeping their peoples under control.

Fascism did not spontaneously arise out of a magical bottle with, for example, Mussolini's Italy in the 1920s. Fascistic-appearing practices have been seen earlier, as noted in Barrington Moore's superb essay, "Totalitarian Elements in Pre-Industrial Societies," in his *Political Power and Social Theory*, but such requisite practices, from Red Scares, to political thuggery, to ideological force-feeding, whether earlier, or more recently, in nonindustrial settings, such as Spain and Portugal, have lacked what was exhibited on the structural level, first, in Italy, and then, Germany: the more rigorous organization of the business system, politically inspired and executed through government in collaboration with leading segments of the industrial and financial communities—a State formation the better to serve business needs in its particulars, but more basic the treatment of capitalism as a systemic consideration, *its* problems, societal tensions, means of self-propagation on increasingly more monopolistic lines, all with the context of international politics and economic always in mind. *This* is the level on which fascism as a meaningful construct operates, not the hate-rantings of a KKK klavern or a Kiwanis luncheon club. That may seem obvious, but in practice we underestimate the foci of power in modern society, what I shall term presently the interpenetration of business and government, and go after, rather, the kooks, who, although not harmless, are, whether or not they realize, the shock troops of an advanced capitalism in need of a climate of fear both to prosecute wars and unload surplus production onto narcotized consumers. Under fascism both in Italy and Germany the rigorous organization of business takes the form of so-called

“fronts,” in fact a totalitarian organization of society into both business “fronts” and labor “fronts,” the better to ensure close supervision, but more practically, to provide the former a greater cohesiveness taking cartel-like form and leading to monopolistic or oligopolistic clustering, and to provide the latter a means of expressing cooperation with business in the spirit of gratitude to those above (aka, victimization through a trickle-down framework of economics and class-stratification).

In the US there was marked interest (as well as considerable investment) in what was transpiring in Italy and Germany under fascist governments, particularly because American business was undergoing the parallel development—but without official government sanction—of supra-organization through trade associations and even what could be called peak associations (incorporating the former), also, like their fascist counterparts overseas, mindful of the need for stability, security, and the self-protecting arm of government. All that was lacking was the formalization of the relationship to make it correspond to fascism. But in thought, if not in deed, the US was not far behind. Corporatism in Europe found its counterpart in 1920s America in the Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturers’ propagation of the doctrine of the *commonwealth of business*, signifying business had become the inner polity beholden only to itself rather than to the nation which provided it security. It also signified much more, the *organic* nature of society, on which was applied, or rather, imposed, the hierarchical ordering of classes and, with government protection, a solipsistic view of privilege. This was not Winstanley’s commonwealth but Hoover’s. Here the work of Columbia economist Robert A. Brady merits attention because he placed side-by-side the official writings of the Nazi fronts, using parallel columns, with that of statements from the NAM and US Chamber of Commerce, an eye-opening exercise demonstrating at times almost identical wording staking out similar areas of interest and concern, the ideological themes of power, property, and hierarchy, in his book, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, along with his magnificent, and cogent for our purposes, further study, *Business as a System of Power*, together, as I see it, ranking with Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth*, in advancing the argument that business is inceptively fascistic (perhaps, I surmise, because of the need to render static the labor-capital relationship, including wage-determination above and a docile, accepting working class below), to which, I speculate further, advanced capitalism, its monopoly capital stage, its continued expansion no longer assured, is *integrally*, not inceptively, fascistic—the quest for stabilization, achieved through political means, in the face of potential and ever-looming senescence.

Whether we speak of business inceptively fascistic, or capitalism integrally so (because the systemic concerns take precedence of those of the individual firm), there is in both a structural and ideological predisposition to fascism, based on hierarchical organization, the political environment of business-government interpenetration, economic purpose and direction, as in the trend toward monopolism, and the psychological introjection common to business and society of the leadership principle, a pecking order of command and obedience running through and unifying the class system. By capitalism’s own assessment (i.e., its leadership-structure, not an impersonal or deterministic process) the State performs a crucial role in the system’s development, even when Laissez-Faire and the Open Door were put forth as legitimating myths. This dependence—actually a *mutual* dependence, in which a consolidated base of monopoly capital translates into greater, more effective military prowess and creates the need to show and employ it—becomes increasingly clear with capitalism’s further advancement, as remedies have to be sought for the volatile nature of the business cycle and the prevention of the severe consequences and subsequent disruptions earlier

experienced in the Great Depression, avoidance of which fuels the drive for Executive Power and the free hand (although the opposite should be true) accorded business.

One does not need Marx to recognize (the recent financial crisis is testimony enough) that capitalism is an inherently *unstable* system. That is where government comes in, the more extreme the recuperative measures needed for stability and the resumption of profit-taking, the closer the combined interrelated synthesis of business and government approaches to fascism. Today, the fashion is austerity, yet fully worked out, austerity, like counterterrorism, because saying one thing, and meaning substantively quite a bit more, reveals, as in fact does the other (for at a deeper level of analysis they work in tandem), the impetus toward conservation of the established order. Austerity involves the political-fiscal assault on the social safety net, while counterterrorism has the dual function, all in the name of fighting terrorism, of mounting an assault on social dissidence at home and implicitly fulfilling counterrevolutionary goals abroad, whether opposition to radical social forces or Third World industrialization. In execution, it is about everything but terrorism, as massive surveillance attests, with its chilling effect on opposition to the government.

Yet to say that capitalism is inherently unstable does not obligate one to pursue the vulgarization of Marx. The notion of inherent contradictions has always troubled me. It is too structurally impersonal. Consistent with an historical reading of dialectical materialism, one can suggest rather that what passes for “contradictions” are in fact conscious efforts and decisions to maximize profits—eminently rational behavior in an admittedly irrational system—and its correlative practices, such as maintain class power and seek out opportunities for market expansion, no matter the obstacles, so that even in the failure of the system, there are no guarantees of social transformation, and, if anything, class dominance remains intact, as does ideology, and the cycle is resumed, usually to the further displacement and degradation of working people. If, however, resumption is not a foregone conclusion, which happens as capitalism begins to atrophy, and as social tensions begin to mount, fascism, here the power and authority of the State, becomes thinkable and, again through conscious action, not some form of determinism, becomes also obtainable. But obtainable, because of an already well-advanced interpenetration, on behalf of business, the State its shield and protector. One doesn’t need a Reichstag fire to bring out the troops (who in any case made an example of the Bonus Marchers in America in 1932), the only contradiction in all of this being that capitalists themselves, while surviving as a class, ignored the warning signs of their own self-indulgent and selfish conduct, thereby bringing the system temporarily into question. (For the uninitiated, one might state, neither hardship alone nor structural fracturing makes a revolution, people do, and they, unlike automatons, have to *will* their actions, dependent in turn on the degree of clarity and conviction of their political consciousness.) My conclusion: “contradictions” are in reality the flash point of profitability in the system; government is not intended for removing them, but rather, for ensuring they work to the benefit of capitalists themselves, and ensuring good order until upper groups have restored their position (which, in any case, they still enjoyed in proportional terms).

Capitalism requires a class-state. Its fascistic constituent comes into play in either of two ways: when capitalism requires the services of the State, whether or not interpenetration has proceeded sufficiently far, if it finds itself, real or imagined, to be besieged by forces hostile to its purposes and direction (labor or, the worship of competition notwithstanding, monopolistic and oligopolistic firms or sectors feeling the pressures of competitors threatening their position in the economy, in

which case, government, in the name of responsible corporate character, sets up, in the name of competition, an anti-competitive framework; the second way, government-business interpenetration has reached solidification to the degree that each element, now conjoined for all practical purposes, integrates through combined power a societal framework that makes possible foreign aggression and internal pacification: a militarization of capitalism which is consonant with the system's final stage of preservation—not subject to domestic interference or disaffection—by force.

Where does America come in? Interpenetration, beginning with Theodore Roosevelt (as shown in Gabriel Kolko's seminal work, *Triumph of Conservatism*), building on the assumption that economic power—a strong monopolistic base—translates into military power, advances the process through his Bureau of Corporations and détente with the House of Morgan, both pointing to a tighter economic structure with government seeking to curb internecine competition in favor of the largest firms. In both cases, Morgan and the investment bankers leading the Bureau, the détente is essentially a gentlemen's affair, men whom Roosevelt trusted because they were members of *his* class and shared his vision of a powerful America resting on an economic foundation of consolidated wealth and a geopolitical program of achieving great-power status, as in the Battleship Navy, for global market penetration. (Anyone who sees Roosevelt as a trust buster, particularly after Kolko, a half-century ago, indulges in wishful thinking.) In the next step, Woodrow Wilson, with the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Trade Commission, and a vigorous export-orientation, carries interpenetration beyond Roosevelt's more informal phase, to the institutionalization of the détente, which qualifies by this point as more fully realized interpenetration. Here Wilsonian liberalism, I speak only of domestic policy, is as removed from laissez-faire as is Roosevelt's from trust busting. What he did, with respect to banking and corporate growth, is to turn something of a semantic trick: he constructed the regulatory framework to promote self-regulation—in both banking and corporate business. Self-regulation may sound like classical liberalism of the Smithian vintage; in reality, it uses government to legitimize private decision-making, and more, implement the decisions against mavericks and troublesome competitors who refuse to accept the ground-rules laid down by the giants in each sector. Self-regulation possessing the aura of regulation is interpenetration at its poetic best. Consider the situation today—regulatory agencies the spokespersons, in effect, for those purportedly subject to regulation. Toss in the revolving door, or even personnel who remain in the government service but drawn directly from the affected interests, and you have the non sequitur of public regulation disserving the public welfare.

The three administrations prior to the New Deal continued the trend in more halting fashion, which, for Harding and Coolidge, meant the era of trade association activities if not supplanting then at least acting as independent forces in the expansion and stabilization of capitalism, and Hoover, however caricatured then and later, did represent a more or less straightline projection from Wilson—not fascistic, but keeping alive elements of business organization that, given post-World War II conditions, constituted a strengthened partner in the march of interpenetration. Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, as might be expected, represent a complex tugging-and-hauling between government and business, regulation genuine and self-regulation, all in the context of securing the rights of labor, separating commercial and investment banking, creating a *vast* program of public works, in sum, permitting, through the National Recovery Administration, among the most powerful stimuli to monopolization and, through the “code authorities,” in organization, not that unlike the Nazi business “fronts,” yet, balanced by the liberation of social forces and ideological themes, not least encouraging the dignity of the unemployed and securing jobs across

the board, white and blue collar, that, despite the survival of capitalism—which was really at stake here—and the green light to concentration, one cannot view the interpenetration existing, as the prelude to fascism. That might come later. Conceivably, if there had been a configuration of social forces that historically held for the balance FDR managed to achieve, capitalism, while unquestionably ascendant among the different elements of society, would not have “progressed” to a higher stage, and with it, the emphasis on military support for capitalism as a world system or, specifically looking inward, for US market penetration and leadership of international financial and trade organizations. This was still an inequitable system, but hardly fascist, which, had it been, would have used class polarization to compel deference from working people and subscription to the purposes of foreign expansion. FDR remains an historic figure pointing toward a managed capitalism never achieved in America, perhaps because capitalism would in time, wherever it exists, throw off the shackles of the public interest and the rights of labor. Within capitalism, he fought the good fight, only to have his work nullified within a few years after his death.

Despite protofascist currents, as in the mindset favoring the extermination of radicals, anarchists, even the foreign-born in general in the period centered around the First World War (TR’s attitude toward the IWW, as an example), I sense, having come of age at the time, that post-1945 continuing forward represents a qualitative change in the American psyche, cause and consequence initially of the Cold War, but really, all of the poisons, racism, antiradicalism, antilabor attitudes and policies, etc., boiling up from below the surface—something neither the New Deal nor the Second World War could eradicate (and probably exacerbated, for those already disposed to hate)—and thus creating an irreducible structural-psychological landscape which allowed capitalism in America to exploit if not, possibly, manufacture the suspicions and fears of government, socialism, the Welfare State, as though internal subversion lurked everywhere, and warranted pre-emptive responses designed and intended to eradicate dissent as by definition unpatriotic. Still, McCarthyism is no more than inchoate fascism, although with the execution of the Rosenbergs, we were already coming pretty damn close. More significant, in studying or plotting the societal direction, was the simultaneous growth of income inequality, business consolidation, the prominence within the economic structure of mega-financial institutions, matched stride for stride with a foreign policy of anticommunism that not only allowed the domestic business system a free pass (along with the curtailment of labor rights), but gave intervention a respectability not seen before. More than McCarthy, consider Kennedy’s Bay of Pigs, which paved the way for Vietnam, which, if not already, paved the way for the CIA as the legitimate arm of violence, and on and on—a record of deceit, invasion, swelling armaments, a National-Security State in-the-making, until we come to the present. Surveillance, secrecy, targeted assassination, indefinite detention, the state-secrets doctrine, the list truly has no end to what can be considered fascistic-inclined policies and practices, overt, covert, national, international, always in lockstep with a political economy dependent on the selfsame policy-context for internal security (against a labor class that has lost its identity in the fiction of the great, subsuming Middle Class) and the unimpeded rationalization of its global operating environment.

Is this fascism? I leave that for the reader to decide, provided, however, he or she does not focus on Tea Partiers, Fox News, Republican intransigence, but rather, probes systemic wrongs, of which those cases are secondary to the structure of power, the integration of the military into the governing system of political-corporate elites. Look to Obama, the Democrats, present-day centrists and progressives, for there lies sophisticated corporatism itself, capable of an international policy of



confrontation with China and a domestic policy which adds to the militarization of capitalism also its financialization, together as perhaps a New Autarky as the rest of the world has second thoughts about American leadership. In terms of analysis, one's definition of fascism might turn from Nazi Germany as the archetype to one resembling more the phase of US capitalist development in the last century: dynamism of productive forces (although this is lessening), nonbudging capitalist internal structure—industrial growth encased in the Old Order. That is exactly the situation of postwar Japan, where interpenetration has proceeded so far as to indicate the very structural characteristics of hierarchy and class stratification, the Old Order, as departure point for monopolistic industry and banking. All that is lacking is militarism and exorbitant defense outlays—and, if America is any indication, that may change as advanced capitalism progresses further. I recall here the phrase of the respected Japanese political scientist Masao Maruyama, when he described Japan's version of interpenetration (which also disturbed him about its implications for the future). He termed the business-government relationship the “close-embrace” system. Following the usage of Barrington Moore in his brilliant comparative history of the principal political-economic modes of development, now specifically with relation to Japan, which he termed “Asian Fascism,” I note, from his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* a phrase which best captures the definition of fascism I have been seeking: “modernization from above.”

AUGUST 8, 2013

### **Cuban Transit: From Fidel to Raul**

In the *New York Times* (July 24) Victoria Burnett reported on an address that Raul Castro delivered to the Cuban National Assembly the preceding day (“Harsh Self-Assessment as Cuba Looks Within”) which had serious criticisms to make of the lack of civility in everyday culture and society, what he saw as a decline in revolutionary spirit. The speech (in Burnett's paraphrase) listed the following: “Cubans build houses without permits, catch endangered fish, cut down trees, gamble, accept bribes and favors, hoard goods and sell them at inflated prices, and harass tourists.... [In addition] Islanders yell in the street, curse indiscriminately, disturb their neighbors' sleep with loud music, drink alcohol in public, vandalize telephones, dodge bus fares and throw stones at passing trains.” In Raul's own words, “They ignore the most basic standards of gentility and respect. All this is going on under our noses, without provoking any objection or challenge from other citizens.”

Leaders in our day are not wont to level with the people, and rather, dwell on soothing platitudes to court favor, while symbolically and, for many, actually, stealing the bread from their mouths while, and as part of, servicing the needs of upper groups. That has *not* happened in Cuba, nor is there a hint of regimentation to follow, in achieving “standards of gentility and respect.” Yet he is plainly frustrated. Raul continued: “I have the bitter sensation that we are a society that is ever better educated, but not necessarily more enlightened.” He is seeking for his people a transformative human life, enlightenment built, first, on better education, which Cuba has achieved to a remarkable degree, but, to complete the process, a civility in which each person treats all others through bonds of solidarity and respect for the individual's identity, rights, welfare: a socialist commonwealth founded, as his examples attest, on mutual respect. The distinction between “better educated” and “more enlightened” is subtle beyond the understanding of most leaders, including our own, because it beckons forward a nonmaterialistic realm of self-development, from which—again the

examples—the Cuban people have backslidden or never fully attained, in either case testifying, regrettably, to the shortcomings of the Cuban Revolution: Raul as Jeremiah, prophet more than president, seeking almost desperately to reverse course and put the revolution back on track. Although often thought a bureaucrat who was stifling Cuba's revolutionary potential, Raul, by pointing to the "regress[ion] in culture and civility," here articulates a purist standard of revolutionary behavior clearly out-of-step with the age, a chasteness of vision no longer in evidence, or perhaps even sustainable, particularly in the face of a world culture of technological intrusions on the privacy and independence of, primarily, the youth. By "chasteness" I mean an ascetic cast, in which the commitment to societal reconstruction—from decent health care to full employment, from equitable wealth distribution to an enlivening popular, as well as higher, culture—trumps consumerism and the narrow regard for wealth, power, and invidious comparisons.

Raul is right to criticize; this is not counterrevolution, but energizing revolution so that, if anything, it *expands* its transformative reach, penetrating the individual's psyche, not for purposes of brainwashing, but inscribing human potentiality as an ever-present aspiration to reach, implicitly, to succeed, with a corresponding institutional potentiality which aspires to the democratization of the social order. The two must be viewed as inseparable, individual and society together mutually reciprocal and supportive, experiencing mental/moral growth. If the individual falters through breaching the standards of fundamental *comity*, so too in like proportion there is a diminution of democratic structure and practice in the social order. I do not, of course, mean the whip, rack, or prison cell as the means of enforcement of standards, but a voluntary desire to reach outside and beyond oneself, the product of a revolutionary education and natural response to the freedom that all have created for themselves. This, to me, was evident in the early days of the Cuban Revolution, chants of *Fi-del, Fi-del, Fi-del*, in those hours'-long speeches and rallies when he spoke, or the way the crowds lined the long route in the triumphal march from the mountains into Havana. Euphoria, spontaneous not forced, as the butcher Batista was made to flee. Perhaps euphoria is not meant to, nor ever does, last, but neither should it disappear without a trace. Raul's complaint, in his address, of his countrymen urinating in public, may seem trivial, and is hardly an earth-shattering wrong which nullifies the Revolution, yet that, and his, also expressed in the address, aversion to the playing of loud music in crowded housing areas, alerts one to the dimensions of a self-demanding, self-inspired revolutionary consciousness, an inner discipline of genuine altruism, which places societal welfare foremost in showing respect for the individual.

Civility is not a bourgeois concept intended to thwart personal liberation, although it has been used in repressive societies in precisely that way, but rather a questioning of ego-aggrandizement so as not to trespass on or denigrate the life-giving freedoms of the others. Socialist personhood is a frightening challenge to live by, but I take that to be what Raul is about here—not the stultified bureaucrat, but the enabler in its best sense of the revolutionary spirit. He said what needs to be said, if Cuba is to provide, by its example, the historical path ahead, not perhaps Marcusean nonrepressive liberation, nor equally, at the other end of the spectrum, a bowdlerized Marxian approach to history and social structure, which finds inevitableness, including the course of revolution, under every bush. He implies that the Cuban Revolution may be stalled, but that it is not over, for why this exhortation if all were already lost? This falls into the best tradition of a political leadership's self-criticism, something Americans never have an opportunity to witness. I fervently wish that the exultation, the *promise* felt at the beginning, could still be recaptured, because, truth will tell, it is now slowly fading, and therefore runs the risk of the very cultural—in the broad

sense—decadence and bureaucratization that have crept into and sometimes dominate other socialist experiences.

I well remember, on my visit home to Miami that New Years Day 1959 the joyous sounds of horns honking in celebration of Batista's downfall and flight—a Miami that had drastically changed by the next decade into a prime source of expatriate-hatred of hemispheric social progress and support for every militaristic-interventionist move on the part of the US right through the present. When my wife Nancy and I visited Cuba in 2002, I sensed that the regression Raul spoke of was not yet fully under way. The schoolhouse we visited in the Sierra Maestra was all that I had imagined in my dreams: one room, children in their neat blue-and-white, attentive, hands eagerly raised—in of all things a math class; and the exterior walls of the school brightly painted by the children themselves. For an earlier account, covering the early years, I commend—it's sitting before me—Lee Lockwood's *Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel* (1967), a superb first-person account, narrative and photographs, along with extensive free-ranging interviews with Fidel, of a people deeply proud of their freedom, of *campasenos*, freed from serfdom, experiencing dignity for the first time, of the personal electricity between Fidel and the people, not simulated, not bulldozed, but genuine beyond anything, even in the throes of false consciousness, I've witnessed in the US. There is something so precious about the formative setting of a people's revolution that...if it could only be conserved, or, even in the stage of its consolidation, somehow still be translated into institutional-cultural-political terms, the long day's journey need not be into night.

Nighttime has already come to America, which is why we fear the Cuban Revolution so greatly, and feel the need to deplore its achievements. The Bay of Pigs invasion, the long-standing Embargo, these are justified by a jaundiced society which finds it easiest to ride the waves of xenophobia, the groundswell of authoritarianism, whatever it takes to distract us from the evils of intervention and regime change, and the inanities of consumerism and the mad dash for wealth, rather than struggle to attain a more meaningful existence than contemporary capitalism offers. This said, I would nonetheless be derelict in my duty to myself if I didn't question the nature and anatomy of revolution, both of which give evidence of retrogression and unsustainability sometime after the initial euphoria wears off and even before consolidation is fully achieved. I refer now to Cuba, but revolution in general should be scrutinized for, in historical practice, endemic flaws, the backsliding of which Raul complains and resists. That does not mean, the revolution was not worth the candle. In every critical area, the Cuban people have benefited, from medical care and the vast improvement in living standards, to the accessibility to education, for those particularly in the countryside, as well as superior medical training and research, and, outside of the US, greater international recognition of the improvements made. Still, the nagging question, except for the comfortable and complacent, again, America, who place greater stock in counterrevolution than in facing, and thereby beginning the painful process of overcoming, the obstacles to equitable wealth-distribution, universal public health care, the democratization of politics and culture, all to which the US deserves a failing grade, to wit: Must revolutions atrophy, is ideology beyond the short-run destined to be unworkable in practice (particularly if solutions to basic social problems succeed), must socialism—in sum—thrive on misery, incapable of reproducing its ethos of solidarity in good times as well as bad?

Gabriel Kolko observed a similar reversal in Vietnam, in the later stages of *its* revolutionary struggle and experience. Still, one must not discredit the initial revolutionary thrust and the social

gains resulting from it, including the rectification of grievances, whether from colonialism or an internally organized system of repression, usually the forward point of imperialism, simply because further stalling occurred. The concern, though, is this arrestment of structural-ideological motion. Raul's address to the Cuban National Assembly demonstrates integrity beyond the norm of standard political leadership (whichever way one looks today, but particularly Obama and his liberalization of counterrevolution). The facts of USG heavy-handed opposition, bipartisan, continuous, since the inception of the Cuban Revolution, and protofascist Cuban émigrés in Miami wielding disproportionate political clout (pushing America further rightward), in addition to the suspension of Russian assistance with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have to count for something in calculating the barriers Cuba faced to a straightout achievement of the revolution as a permanent force. Yet, these circumstances might have worked to the opposite effect, steeling the will of the Cuban people to resist the denigration of the revolution, if they were determined to stay the course. Whether the Embargo can be blamed as the political-economic-ideological culprit, is too easy by far an explanation for not holding tightly to the spark of socialist freedom, for in the final analysis responsibility rests on the people themselves to keep and practice the idealism acted on in the phase of revolutionary struggle and for the decades after.

Cuba pre- 2000 was a bright spot of world democratization. Why the descent, carefully, mournfully, described by Raul, I cannot explain, except in the conventional circular terms describing revolutions past, an inevitable Thermidorean reaction I nevertheless find hard to credit. But the US cannot think, as testimony to its Exceptionalism, presumed omnipotence, possession of a divine mission, or other self-legitimizing myths, that it held in check the Cuban Revolution all by itself, its devious global and Latin American diplomatic initiatives, its attempt at isolation and ruination of the Cuban nation and people. Nation and people alike must also share in the fate of the revolution, *provided* of course attempts at suppression by the United States are not somehow neglected. On balance, even public urination and loud music do not invalidate what has been accomplished thus far, and that might serve as a foundation for further growth.

At this point it is perhaps unwise to pose as a savant or connoisseur of revolution, not least, because I have not paid my dues, and moreover, such roles smack of the pretentiousness and sterility all too often found in the academic world, but it would do no harm to think out loud here about what ultimately may be at stake. To raise these points, is to guard against them, if not to find the answers, which in any case should not be treated as universal or invariable conclusions. Are human beings politically-ideologically *finite* in thought, belief, action—enclosed within certain boundaries that make the realization of human freedom unrealizable? This is not to say that the journey should not always be in progress, it should and it must be continuous, without end. But that finitude cannot be explained away, *or can it be explained* (but not away), by profounder instinctual blockages with respect to human autonomy and the complete acceptance, without guilt or inhibitions, of the emancipated self, whose full description we still have no inkling of (aside from hints of the Metaphysical Poets, French Symbolists, or other sources not credible in the eyes of reigning political wisdom, regardless of system of political economy or social structure)? Even socialism is not, from the standpoint of contemporary politics, ideology, social systems, and thus crossing existing ideological cleavages, fully transcendent—its conception of freedom beholden as well to so much of the Old Order. In that light, why flay the Cubans, for they have done more than most in the present day to affirm life free from exploitation? Raul knows this, as Fidel knew its

possibility when, decades earlier, he witnessed the Revolution in all its strivings and splendor—which he himself helped to awaken.

Permit me to look back a half-century, to a time when social science entertained the big questions (not said pejoratively, but questions that were truly consequential), stimulated in part by the very closure of discussion, when those, tired of the Cold War atmosphere of intellectual consensus-theorization and outright repression and firings in the colleges and universities, intellectually fought back, and shaped a critique of US structure and policies that retrieved the importance of *class* (taboo in academic circles) and the *power* of ruling groups, with C. Wright Mills on the popular level, Barrington Moore, the more analytical level, counterpoised to the antiradicalism of Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Bell, and the *New American Right* essayists, among many others—for the denial of social protest in the American past was nearly ubiquitous, the ticket to academic stardom. These questions, still bearing the memory traces of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Left-Freudians, unashamedly sought to understand the relations between the individual and society, thus calling attention to the role of the political economy, itself enlarged in meaning to include structural-psychological mechanisms of repression, in enhancing or perverting, dulling, and/or destroying human potentiality, to which, appositely, the discussion turned to the social context qua breeding ground promoting war, imperialism, political-economic hegemony, and not to be neglected, because an holistic approach (i.e., complete systems) was valued and acted upon, the causes of alienation rooted in the social system. Yes, a good time to be alive, dodging Red Scares, opportunistic academics, and the rigorous scrubbing of radicalism from popular consciousness (and college courses), the while plunging deeper into the mysteries—hardly *that*—of capitalism, and bringing to the front the comparative analysis of capitalism, fascism, and socialism: a camaraderie of dissenters, incidentally, some who immediately saw the beauty of the Cuban Revolution, as did Mills, in *Listen Yankee* (1960).

One takes Raul seriously, but does not exaggerate his National Assembly address as condemnation of the revolution. It was not. As I'm sure he realized, this was not to be an exercise in self- or collective-flagellation; too much remained to be done to drift off into paralytic self-pity. But the timing is right: Raul's speech is a wake-up call coinciding with the fascistic drift in our own society, as made evident by the Snowden Revelations, which showed the anatomy of a power-driven government harnessed to an exploitative economic system. Perhaps he has cleared the air for Cuba to get back on track; perhaps not. I hope my jaundiced view of youth worldwide is mistaken, and, for Cuba, a more ascetic mindset, which I believe is a prerequisite to human freedom, will take hold. Asceticism, not to be confused with austerity (the sophisticated exploitation of working people), would continue the movement of people to a more egalitarian structural and social plane and breed a disdain of waste, along with the rejection of a culturally approved superiority complex as well as excessive material goods and material striving. If too simplistic and historically untenable to expect, the revolution nonetheless will depend for its success or failure on the attitude adopted toward consumerism. Cuban youth seem the weak reed, as is happening elsewhere, now jumping ideological boundaries (e.g., China, becoming luxury-conscious), as though a cancerous growth supplanting—indeed, displacing—concern for the social welfare. If Cuba contracts the disease, and recapitulates the ideological horrors of capitalism, such as focusing on unlimited capital accumulation and Veblen's invidious-conspicuous consumption, the revolution will go speedily downhill. Raul was uncannily right in emphasizing civility, because it is in the manners of a people, the ability to say brother, sister, comrade, and *mean* it, that will keep the revolution on course.

If it can maintain its revolutionary sense of purpose, which America almost pathologically fears, because serving as an alternative mode, and therefore competing model, of modernization and developmental pathway, it runs circles around the US on the satisfaction of basic needs, Cuba will have contributed to the global reawakening toward social justice. Will other parts of the world pick up the torch? Is there true promise in the Arab Spring, in crowd-actions protesting austerity (as noted, not to be confused with asceticism, but rather, a trite stratagem for dismantling social safety nets), an awakening of the victims of outsourcing in Asian countries? Or is the world enmeshed with and mesmerized by its technological gadgets, the cell phone substituting for, even replacing, human contact, to the extent of producing then utter depersonalization, and with it, solipsistic individuals wholly rejecting collective feeling and action? Cuba, by this token, is caught in a global squeeze play, making all the more imperative the success of its revolution. Socialist man must not become alienated man. Fidel led the way to emancipation, Raul is the conservator as revolutionist. The latter's address came on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, three days shy of July 26<sup>th</sup>, a glorious day on the revolutionary calendar.

AUGUST 9, 2013

### **Embassy Closings, Depravity of Government and a Murdered Child**

Obama's legacy can be summed up in two words: *targeted assassination*. We know that drone strikes continue, Pakistan giving way to greater emphasis on Yemen, of which there were several in the last two weeks, killing four presumed operatives of the al Qaeda affiliate, and which had some bearing on the intercepted communications between the al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, and the leader of AQAP, Nasir ul-Wuhayshi, calling for an attack on US interests in the region. Frankly, on its face, given the vast territory thought to be involved, the amorphousness of the purported threat (our government is in the habit of not leveling with us) suggests sufficiently imprecise content as either to question veracity of the whole event or recognition that, via the dynamics of blowback, it is next to impossible for defensive action.

The American presence in the region, we are now reminded, is everywhere, exposed, and in all probability resented. The interception, claimed to foreshadow an al-Qaeda mobilization and attack of catastrophic proportions, the most alarming direct alert since 9/11, has resulted in embassy closings, the airlift out of diplomatic personnel, a global warning to US travelers—possible overreaction, and in any case America perplexed and in a state of retreat.

One can be pardoned for initially thinking, the timing is significant because, with growing criticism of NSA surveillance, the need for obfuscation was great, a pattern not unknown in White House practice, to which Obama, in every policy area, has proven adept, when it became apparent that the betrayal of principle—from intervention to health care to business and banking regulation—necessitated less stonewalling than simply, as in the National Socialist formula of the 1930s, “divert the gaze of the masses,” that is, change the subject, tighten the screws, press the loyalty button, keep Americans on their toes, if not scared witless then at least willing to acquiesce in the excesses of counterterrorism, itself shorthand for State surveillance of its own people to check any tendencies toward radicalism and the questioning of authority. Tweak the situation in Yemen, earn bushels of points for repression and thought control at home.

It would be hard to separate the embassy closings from the stimulation of heightened tensions which create a political-ideological environment for more of the same—uncritically accepted: intervention, assassination, heavy defense expenditures fused with an increasingly dangerous global geopolitical strategy. I find this entirely plausible, coming from an administration shrouded in secrecy, encased in deception, and, for these reasons, devious to a fault. In my informal tally: one-third of the explanation for the current impasse.

Equally important in explanatory value is the framework in which this geopolitical strategy operates, the assumptions driving national-security policies, a global framework of traditional US pursuits brought to a higher (i.e., more lethal) stage of international politics. Obama is neither genius nor innovator, merely one, at this transitional point in the nation's history, from the standpoint of the international system (unilateral American dominance, always an uphill struggle, recedes with the rise of a multipolar complex and Third World nations coming of industrial age) and the structure of capitalism itself (a qualitative leap to an unquestioned monopoly-capital stage, in which its financialization and militarization become prominent characteristics), who appreciates, or pretends to, the need for intensifying the policies of his predecessors to be of greater service to an integrated Business-Government State.

I say “pretends to” because he essentially works from the gut, without the intellectual and technical equipment, devoted to broad established principles, almost truisms, in the historical development of policy: the steadiness of capitalism at home and abroad as the criterion of economic legitimacy, counterrevolution as the sheet anchor of foreign policy, government secrecy to facilitate the implementation of the foregoing, as in deregulation in the domestic sphere, intervention, the foreign sphere, all the while giving increasing attention to new modes of warfare consistent with the already enormous build-up of armed forces and modernization of the nuclear arsenal. Not bad, for a beginner, if in fact he be that, for a *core* of reaction is apparent from the perversion of societal-welfare policies and programs, leading naturally and almost instinctively for Obama to emulate the hierarchical-militaristic predisposition and political-economic perspective of ruling groups.

Why the concentrated presence of the United States, as per this impending threat, in North Africa and the Middle East? In addition to an Israel-centric military-diplomatic commitment, which necessarily is to embroil America in intraregional power struggles and serve as back-up for Israeli international policies of support for dictatorships and conservative governments in an ideological paradigm of US-Israel mutual-security protection, and the more familiar matter, the treatment of the Palestinians, as quite possibly the prime reason for jihadism, hostility to the West, and, in Islamic eyes, the expression of imperialism in microcosm, xenophobic, insulting, etc., there is also, beyond Israel, American-defined priorities for maintaining its regional presence in the area, which in geopolitical terms is a decisive crossroads for the establishment of a sphere of influence having multiple purposes and functions.

As in the major airfield and drone base in Djibouti, the US seeks a wide swath of intensive coverage, readily accessible, which, in the large picture means a military-oriented armed-stabilization not only of the self-evident oil supply on advantageous terms, but also a selfsame stabilization operating in all directions, the Horn of Africa, Italy and southeastern Europe, the Near and Middle East, protected sea routes, having as its focus, a broadly-conceived counterrevolutionary stand throughout the area (with consequences for European and global military and diplomatic alliances) thence, the foundation in place, successive encroachments

eastward, Iran, Afghanistan, most basic of all, the encirclement, containment, and isolation of China.

In this light, Yemen is a convenience, a pretext, an opportunity for executing the western side of a pincer movement, part of the double military-strategic envelopment of China, Obama's "pivot" or Pacific-first strategy, in which resources, notably naval and air power, are being relocated to the Pacific area itself representing the eastern side of the pincer movement. The world is fast learning of Obama's obsession with China as the new superpower on the block, to be taken down several pegs. Here Islam is secondary or even peripheral to the war-games, hegemonic-craving national-security culture of American policy makers, with Obama serving as their head.

In the largest context, China itself has been subsumed into the mentality of permanent war as integral to American development and survival, the clear resumption, if it ever went away, of a Cold War vision of world politics and economics, directed primarily to a new enemy, original thought processes still intact, and possessing utility for the domestication of society at home, in the form of submission to authority as the American Way of Life.

The remainder, what I am calling the depravity of government, follows implicitly from the recondite motives of government, particularly as harnessed to a global hegemonic impulse which is itself driven by the stage of mature capitalism in which America finds itself. The system, here an interpenetrated structure of government and business, or if one prefers, the State and Capitalism in systemic alliance, has led to a desensitization of the political-economic-military elites to the violence and destruction they've wrought in the world, easy for them to miss given their absorption into the world of power, the weapons they've chosen, the punitive attitude needed to buttress their self-righteousness and move in for the kill.

Desensitization above has as its complement depersonalization below, elites' knowledge—to which they have not been incidental participants in creating—that opposition, even when it comes to the commission of war crimes, is and will continue to betoken, given the apathy of the American people as a result of structural-cultural pressures toward false consciousness, assisted on an intangible but still psychologically intimidating level, by the possession of vast military power and resources, the more out of sight the better in telegraphing the message of unreserved strength awaiting potential use if needed. A silent Damoclean sword hangs above America, reminding citizens of their essential powerlessness (the message's corollary) and giving further meaning to depersonalization as, personal dependence of the individual sinks in, an invitation to purge oneself in the splash of patriotism and, with that, the further invitation to identify actively with all things military, including habits to be incorporated into civilian life: marching lockstep to a single drummer's beat—POTUS, with supporting cast three deep. The existence of the mushroom cloud for scenic background doesn't hurt either.

From the foregoing, the successful—at least to now—domestication of the American people, as though cows led out to pasture, one moves outward to what I can only term, the preliminaries—carried quite far—to American fascism, not, however, as the spouting of fringe groups and unbalanced billionaires, but mainstream structural-economic development presided over by the leadership of the decisive sectors of power, which, in addition to the customary composition of ruling groups (again, government-business interpenetration), now the military as well.



Here we find secrecy as the negation of democratic government, surveillance, the negation of privacy and civil liberties, rampant Executive power (skillfully covered over by liberal-appearing rhetoric), the negation of Constitutional principles and the rule of law, a State that treats its people as morons who do not deserve self-rule, the belittling of those who seek what had once been a prerequisite of democracy, now all but forgotten: transparency, applicable across the board, courts forbidden to keep their decisions secret, regulatory agencies which actually regulate, and do so in the public interest, a president who is truthful, granted, old-fashioned out-of-style societal verities, the absence of which, readily recognized by the public, leading to a cynicism vibrating as one with the leadership that countenances everything that the National-Security Fortress-America State enacts and does, armed as it is with the state-secrets doctrine, an FBI-CIA apprehensiveness about dissent, and now, displaying great initiative as Obama's new toy, after JSOC and DOJ, the National Security Agency.

What has this to do with Yemen and embassy closings? America would not be currently on the spot if it did not put itself there. Was the al Qaeda threat in response to the killing of four putative terrorists, or is something more involved, specifically, the hegemonic framework and its legitimization of violence as a total US posture, whose effects reach down into the lives of any who stand in the way of American goals of world leadership?

The situation in Yemen today helps to explain the embassy closings. The life of one child, shrunken, turning yellow, as life slips away because of a missile fired from an American drone, yes, it takes only one, to see the psychopathological dimensions of war, war fought for national prestige and power (and that of its business system), serves as the indictment for war crimes, the indictment of Obama's cold-bloodedness, for it is he who bears responsibility for authorizing drone strikes (many of which he personally selects), the much-praised "cool" which possesses the coldness of the morgue slab on which some of his victims lay. They are the lucky ones, descriptions of victims' fate usually find the individual *vaporized* or reduced to a *blood spat*. These are facts well-known outside the United States, less so within—or simply ignored therein.

On the night of August 6, the BBC, ordinarily not critical of the US, and even here not intentionally so, had a segment of its tv news showing the destruction of Yemini areas struck by American drones—the devastation widespread, and, as part of the coverage, interviewed two Yemini men on the spot whose statements were simultaneously translated. The first interviewee, about forty, a crowd around him, began: "Al Qaeda is responsible for this [destruction], and those that fund them." Whether or not he was being tactful at first, he then immediately added, "But also the drones, they are killing our people, killing our children and destroying our honor." Then, in a remark, wise beyond measure, that speaks volumes about why the terror, why the threats, why the hostility toward America, why the perception of evil, this man says: "The drones don't differentiate between people. *They just kill.*" (Italics, mine) Already one begins to suspect the official report about the killing of al Qaeda militants, as explanation for issuing the threat. We've seen from the Stanford-NYU law schools' report on civilian casualties, compiled by members of their combined faculties, some of whom gathered testimony in the field, that drone strikes have been directed at funerals (mourners of a supposed terrorist, official reasoning goes, must themselves be terrorists) and first responders (those who come to the aid of the victims, and therefore terrorist sympathizers).

It was the second interviewee, the father of two children, sitting alone, in mourning, whose anguished voice compelled me to write this article. First, we hear the reporter (paraphrased): A man

and his two children outside a health clinic—where they had sought shelter—hit by an American drone strike; they then ran to a school and hid in the basement. The school was hit too. Now the father spoke: “It was as if everyone was burning. It was all dust. When the smoke cleared, I saw that my son’s leg was bleeding. And my daughter was hit on the back of the head.” Reporter: “*He carried his children out. His son survived, but his 8 year old daughter BLED TO DEATH.*” (Italics, caps., mine) Father: “As she bled, she went yellow. She actually started to shrink in my arms.” Is there any wonder, the embassy closings? The reporter concluded the segment: “President Obama has said that drone strikes kill far fewer civilians than conventional bombs or ground operations.” Cold-blooded, arrogant, the slab in the morgue is the Equator compared with the moral vacuum in which he operates.

America in Yemen, and judging from the number of closings, elsewhere in the region, is in retreat, I think, deservedly so. There is little public discussion of drone warfare, the desensitization above, the depersonalization below, with a dose of bread and circuses, like in Roman times, to keep the slaughter going. Liberals/progressives compartment reality, seeing what they choose to (even then, as in health care, regulation, conservation, policy-on-policy, erroneously), looking aside from the rest, including now, with surveillance, the clear makings of a Police State (itself first-cousin to the National-Security State). But it is that eight-year-old girl, bleeding to death in her father’s arms, who, looking down from Heaven, knows America for what it is rapidly becoming, and has the last word. Cruelty, sadism, Fascism on the threshold, all of the above, with drone warfare defining the head, heart, conscience of us all.

AUGUST 16, 2013

### **Egypt is Bleeding, Thanks to US Dollars for Military Thugs**

Do I single out the *New York Times*? No, it is a microcosm of the thinking, planning, and assumptions of US Imperialism, itself having invariably a Janus-faced position, looking and acting simultaneously outward and inward, mounting a global framework of political-economic-ideological hegemony abroad, unimpeded capitalism and widening class-differentials at home. One cannot, and this includes The Times, compartment the two, being “progressive” in one sphere of government activity, reactionary in the other—and the same goes for those who write about or otherwise analyze it. US policy making is an integrated whole, possessing a capitalist core and militaristic tentacles.

What has this to do with current events in Egypt, the massacre of the unarmed carried out by those with arms supplied by the United States? I have answered my own question, the enormous military subvention of dictators carried on over many years, for reasons as complex as geopolitical strategy in the advancement of American capitalist commercial and financial penetration of global markets, to those quite simple: love of militarism for its own sake, and seeking out militaries both as ideal companions and those willing to do US bidding. Think School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga., as consummating a marriage of the like-minded, trained to kill in cold blood. (Obama missed that education, yet seems perfectly capable of vaporizing civilian populations through armed drones for targeted assassination.) So, it hardly surprises that with news of the ongoing massacre in Egypt, America dawdles, “threatening” (deserving quote marks because a slap on the knuckles,

accompanied by the usual wink) suspension of a program which *directly* ensured democratic life would find inhospitable ground.

Will American foreign military aid ever be scrutinized, let alone stopped? We sit on our hands as a nation, while the slaughter continues—yet unctuously proclaim to the world our adherence to democratic principles, obviously coded to stand for market fundamentalism and global counterrevolution—a bipartisan consensus, whatever the differences bruited about (largely to conceal that consensus) by the major parties.

Let's look more closely, Egypt in the last 48 hours (Aug. 14-15), as of this writing. The assault begins. We owe much to the reporting of David Kirkpatrick, light-years away from the response of the Editorial Board (my point, such frontline accounts of *Times* investigative reporters makes the more inexcusable the gap that exists between the editorials and the news-gathering, especially that coming *from* its own people). Kirkpatrick writes, in this early account: "Egyptian security officers stormed two encampments packed with supporters of the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi, on Wednesday in a *scorched-earth assault* that killed hundreds, set off a violent backlash across Egypt and underscored the new government's determination to crush the Islamists who dominated two years of *free elections*. (Italics, mine) He reminds us this was "the third mass killing of Islamist demonstrators" since Morsi's ouster by the military. "But the scale—lasting more than 12 hours, with armored vehicles, bulldozers, tear gas, birdshot, live ammunition and snipers—and the ferocity far exceeded the Interior Ministry's promises of gradual and measured dispersal." One does not have to elaborate on his writing. What stands out is the sustained nature of the heavy assault. "At least one protester was incinerated in his tent. Many others were shot in the head and chest [location of wounds is always telling, here no intention to disperse, but to kill, reminding me of accounts of our own Great Railway Strikes of 1877], including some who appeared to be in their teens, including the 17-year-old daughter of a prominent Islamist leader, Mohamed el-Beltagy." The assault on peaceful sits-ins was undertaken in the full knowledge that whole families would be encamped.

Still, Aug. 14, we read from another vantage point, Kareem Fahim and Mayy El Sheikh's account in The Times, where again it was clear that this was disciplined, methodical mass murder, now seen through the eyes of a young mother: "Hayam Hussein had gone to sleep, with her infant daughter by her side, after early-morning prayers. One moment, silence. Then, the sound of war." The writers continue: "Tear gas canisters fell from the sky. Sirens announced the arrival of armored cars. There were screams of panic and pain, and frantic warnings of snipers roaming on rooftops and bullets raining down on the encampment in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square. She ran for cover with her daughter, toward a mosque in the center of the protest camp." She and the other Morsi supporters expected an attack, and "they built barricades of bricks, sandbags and steel," and "gathered sticks and rocks." Yet, when the attack came, "shortly after sunrise on Wednesday, they appeared stunned by its fury." The army and police, with "heavy armor and deadly weapons," swept into their encampment, "the third mass killing of civilians since the military took power on July 3." The initial warnings included safe passage for women and children, to which the reporters write: "This was nothing like that." Like the earlier killings, "the government gunmen appeared to strike their victims with terrible accuracy, the head and chest." Snipers attacked the few yards of open space before hospitals—more deaths, more heart-wrenching scenes at the makeshift morgues.

At home, still the 14<sup>th</sup>, we find Mark Landler and Michael Gordon's coverage of the President's vacation, under the heading, "U.S. Condemns Crackdown but Announces No Policy Shift," the latter speaking volumes about Obama's cold-hearted cynicism and cunning, and Washington's general commitment to favorable militaristic solutions. Edgartown is far removed from Cairo and Egypt generally (as repression continues to spread throughout the country). This is before suspension is announced, although certainly the massacre already evident should have warranted the cut-off at the very least (one cannot expect this or any administration to order a full-scale critical review of foreign military spending with a view to termination—for otherwise America would not be America, given its historical-structural-ideological policy framework of hegemonic demiurgic monopoly-capital). The reporters: "The Obama administration on Wednesday condemned the Egyptian military's bloody crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood protesters, but showed no signs of taking any tough steps, like suspending American aid, in response." That they did, finally, after the article was published, suggests their hand was forced or, as usual, damage control when the rest of the world was outraged. Kerry was point man, while Obama, "vacationing here on Martha's Vineyard, had no public reaction. As his chief diplomat was speaking of a 'pivotal moment for Egypt,' the president was playing golf at a private club." It seems like his Martha Vineyard vacations "put Mr. Obama in an awkward but familiar place"—last time, in 2011, it was Libya. This time, on Wednesday morning, he was briefed by Susan Rice, "[b]ut he appeared determined not to allow events in Egypt to interrupt a day that, besides golf, included cocktails at the home of a major political donor, Brian Roberts." We were assured, however, that POTUS was keeping tabs of the situation. (As of this writing, even the joint military exercise with Egypt, Bright Star, scheduled for next month, has not been cancelled.)

With this background, The Times Editorial Board, fully mindful of the preceding day's dispatches from the front (and the Vineyard), we see its editorial, "Military Madness in Cairo," appreciating the military violence yet unwilling to condemn future military support—suspension, not termination. Nor does The Times question foreign military aid as such. The editorial begins on a somewhat promising note: "With yet another blood bath in the streets of Cairo Wednesday, Egypt's ruling generals have demonstrated beyond any lingering doubt that they have no aptitude for, and apparently little interest in, guiding their country back to democracy. I say 'somewhat' because, despite conducting a 'blood bath,' the generals far from being butchers are instead tone deaf, lacking aptitude and interest. The result, it warns, could be 'a murderous civil war,' and itself 'a foreign policy disaster for the United States,' because 'Egypt is the most populace and influential country in the Arab world,' and also, 'Israel's most strategically important neighbor.' Although The Times doesn't say so, it has put its finger on why the US must go slow in criticizing the generals—no matter how bloody the situation gets. As usual, the paper lectures Obama on what he should do (making demands, of course, is bad form, coming out in opposition, worse still): He "must make clear his unequivocal opposition to the Egyptian military's conduct," via suspension of military aid and canceling the military exercises. Sounds good, except that it adds, "these steps can be reversed if the generals change their ways," at best, an irresolute gesture, which generals the world over, in response, may or may not make cosmetic changes to fundamental repression whenever caught in the act. (Egypt, by The Times's admission, has been receiving such aid, implementing military rule, "for decades," although with hardly a murmur on its part, or more generally, wherever generals govern, as in several fascist settings, silence remains golden.) In one breath, the editorial acknowledges that "[h]undreds of peaceful demonstrators were killed Wednesday when military and police units used helicopters, snipers, bulldozers and tear gas to

evict” them, and “a monthlong nationwide state of emergency” was proclaimed, while in another, Obama is left off the hook, also as usual, on the grounds that “Washington’s influence on Egyptian public opinion generally is limited.” Essentially, take the money and run.

Then, the same day as the editorial appeared (Aug. 15), we see the article by Kirkpatrick, still in Cairo, and Alan Cowell, from London, entitled “Death Toll in Egypt Clashes Climbs to 525,” repeating the charge of a “scorched-earth assault by security forces to raze two pro-Morsi protest camps in Cairo” on Wednesday. Now Thursday, the Brotherhood urged followers “to take to the streets,” the “violent backlash across Egypt,” because of the assault, expected to generate “the new government’s determination to crush the Islamists who dominated the free elections over the past two years.” What was added to the earlier account was a scene of devastation and anguish: “At one landmark mosque, relatives stood over the bodies of up to 240 dead, shrouded in white and laid out in neat rows. The ice keeping the bodies chilled was melting as household fans played over the makeshift morgue. Many of the bodies seemed to be badly burned. One man slumped against a pillar, his face contorted in grief. By Muslim tradition, the deceased are usually buried within 24 hours of dying.” In addition, we see the wider response: “The violence was almost universally criticized by Western governments. Obama, not among the critical voices, merely, his spokesperson saying, the violence contradicts pledges made by the interim government, and the US “would continue to remind Egypt’s leaders of their promises and urge them ‘to get back on track.’” Prime Minister Erdogan, of Turkey, wanted an early Security Council meeting “to discuss what he labeled a ‘massacre.’” President Hollande, of France, called in the Egyptian ambassador to condemn the violence and “demand an end to the repression,” language neither Obama nor The Times would use. General Sisi—scorched earth assaults; Obama—targeted assassinations, to which can be added, the scorched earth assaults on privacy, dissent, truth-in-government, due process of law, through a maniacal policy of surveillance.

Late footnote: Mark Handler, “In Rebuke to Egypt, Obama Cancels Joint Military Exercises,” (NYT, Aug. 15), the self-evident happens, a skillful display of disapproval at the murderous binge of the Egyptian military, largely financed by the US, while, on close reading, Obama does everything to minimize the import and effect of the decision. Obama: “While we want to sustain our relationship with Egypt, our traditional cooperation cannot continue as usual while civilians are being killed in the streets.” No, indeed—as he takes a-pox-on-both-your-houses attitude, in order to exonerate the military, saying, “the cycle of violence and escalation needs to stop,” presumably implicating the Muslim Brotherhood as equally culpable. He did not cancel the usual military aid. Landler shrewdly observes: “But while Mr. Obama condemned the violence, which has left more than 500 demonstrators dead and thousands wounded, he emphasized that the United States *did not intend to abandon its broader partnership with the Egyptian military*, which has spanned three decades.” (Italics, mine) His Defense Secretary, Hagel, also seems adept at mouthing the right words, as in speaking to Sisi that the Egyptian government (aka, military) “must refrain from violence, respect freedom of assembly, and move toward an inclusive political transition”—failure to do any of which is hardly likely to rupture the military friendship and collaboration between the two countries. And Obama, for his part, refused to say whether or not Morsi’s ouster by the military was a *coup*, which by the terms of the legislation would terminate military aid. Four little letters, c-o-u-p, would be an excellent test of Obama’s integrity and US intentions. Have no fear, Bright Star, an ambitious plan to integrate the Egyptian military into the so-called coalition forces, is not in a state of eclipse.

My *New York Times* Comment (Aug. 15) on the editorial about military repression follows:

“Suspending assistance to Egypt’s antidemocratic military”: Why suspension? Why not unconditional termination? Why military aid in the first place? NYT cannot make a clean break with dictatorship. Period. If this were Tianamen Square, we’d never hear the end of it. But brutality and repression receive a “temporary suspension” only, when the military works with us, and frankly, Israel. This ugly bloodshed is tolerated because of the fundamental animus toward all things Islamic—Morsi was not the authoritarian monster portrayed. Yet democratically-elected leadership, no matter how self-serving the theme in US foreign policy when it is the good guys who get elected, is tossed in the garbage can when we don’t agree with the results AND when we have a military to work with. Call it the militarization of American consciousness, or whatever; for aid will be resumed the moment a face-saving device is found.

Meanwhile, Egypt is bleeding, thanks to US dollars to the thugs.

AUGUST 20, 2013

### **The Globalization of Militarism**

Events in Egypt take on cosmic significance as the forward edge of world counterrevolution. Not simply an eruption, a slightly more strident form of business-as-usual, but indicative of a sharper rightward turn in which governments and peoples turn away as state-sponsored murder is conducted with impunity. Egypt is not even a civil war, in which case one might choose sides and read into the situation matters of principle and ideology. In this case, massive force confronts an essentially unarmed populace, raising issues which transcend mere side-taking and reflect instead the elemental question, Can the individual survive, grow, expand, within an international system in which national self-interest trumps human needs and legitimates repression as the means to achieving hierarchically imposed goals? Here Egypt is really a *pawn*, internally military-dominated, but that itself predicated on an hegemonic framework of world capitalist penetration, starting with regional and not solely Egyptian proportions, under American leadership. Gen. Sisi is a foot-soldier in the Western Capitalist army of geopolitical dominance engaged in undercutting and permanently holding at bay the seemingly peripheral intruders, notably, China and Russia, with Japan and India made certifiably “Western” because of fulfilling a potential strategic role as stabilizing and containing the other two.

Militarism must not be allowed to fail. Releasing Mubarak (whether or not realized) is like exhumation of the war criminals of the recent past, a reminder that evil deeds, under stress of revision, not only go unpunished, in that the social forces which made them possible are back in business, but also become celebrated. Whether authoritarianism is a vehicle for capitalism, or capitalism, for authoritarianism, we see that advanced capitalist-industrial states, perhaps integral to their mature stage of development, require the total rationalization of the productive system and the human counterpart to that system—a purposely dry formulation of Max Weber’s rational-legal framework in his *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* in order to suggest (beyond Weber in this one respect) that human beings necessitate the same degree of control and predictability, which is what we mean by rationalization, as the productive order itself. As capitalist development increases in complexity everything must be seamless, nothing permitted out-of-kilter, machine production and the individual fused as one, lest fissures occur which expose greater strains, which

in turn promote business-cycle volatility, all to the detriment of order, stability, predictability, on which, it is mortally feared by ruling groups, social unrest is stimulated and thrives.

Capitalism is a system on tenterhooks, social disturbance magnified out of all objective proportion in fear—not wholly irrational—of complete unraveling. What is true for the domestic society is equally if not more true for the international order in which it operates, the latter's first priority, even condition for existence, being the preservation, stabilization, and, it hopes, guidance of, and leadership within, that order. Egypt, admittedly, seems a dot on the political-economic-ideological hegemonic landscape; actually, it is more—although circumstances have thrust it forward for purposes of analysis. Possibly another hot spot would have dramatized as well the aforementioned dynamics of the world situation, yet the nakedness of the repression provides, given Egypt's geographic location, a good departure point. For a moment, it seems we are back to the falling-domino theory central to the Cold War mental-set. If Egypt falls, here, to the Muslim Brotherhood, and, implicitly, al Qaeda hiding behind it, the whole of the Middle East will follow (including the extinction of Israel), thence expanding every which way: Europe, Africa, the world conquest of jihadists-Islamism through universal infiltration. Nonetheless, however genuine the Western fear, assisted by a somewhat ingrained, systemic, cultural xenophobia, this is at best secondary to world, particularly US, capitalist imperatives of trade, investment, natural-resources flow, and OIL.

Militarism trumps social justice in the global capitalist paradigm. Brazil and Chile came before, Egyptian generals the Pinochets of a still more decisive geostrategic sphere of influence. In the region, the US has a self-defined obligation to Israel, non-negotiable, even were it to be tested by a preemptive Israeli air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, or tested, through military and intelligence backup, should Israel and its neighbors go to war. What now emerges, because of the Israeli public-relations campaign through its embassies and consulates in world capitals on behalf of the Egyptian military (atrocities and all), known to analysts anyway, is the close ties between the two military commands. Israel has, not so privately, taken sides, yet more important than its immediate defensive needs is its assisting role in carrying out US goals starting with the region, and expanding to political-economic infinity (i.e., the restoration of unilateral financial-commercial-military dominance). Without the US, Israel would be if not a pastoral backwater then a more diverse society not unlike Lebanon or Jordan of, say, the 1970s-80s. But without Israel, the US would still operate according to its core definitions of self-interest, thereby making Israel complicit but passive in policy execution. Capitalist expansion via projecting market fundamentalism on the world, including widening the rationalization of industry in bottom-fishing for the lowest labor costs, and, as usual, securing the most advantageous terms for trade, investment, raw materials, sums up the self-interest core.

Egypt is manna from heaven. The US has been losing the struggle for world-capitalist virility because its single-minded focus on profit-maximization (not even long-term, but more desperately, grabbing where possible, as in the short-cut to the financialization of capitalism through creating and marketing exotic financial instruments) reveals signs and strains of structural senescence, as in a decaying industrial base, high levels of unemployment and foreclosure, and ever-widening class differentials, resulting in endemic underconsumption. How, then, get back into the ball game, especially after becoming accustomed to a position of first place for so long? Egypt is *one*, but not the only, way. Obama's incremental approach: Through drone warfare, keep up targeted

assassinations. Whether or not Al Qaeda operatives are hit is irrelevant, so long as the world knows America is gunning for its “enemies,” whomever and wherever they may be—America’s selective use of terror (more bang for the buck), striking terror into the hearts of the presumed terrorists. But even he knows better. As he and Brennan worked out, constantly revising and adding to the hit list will compel subsequent administrations to follow the same protocol, leading to the acceptance of the doctrine of permanent war. Binding others to targeted assassination has the advantage of preventing America’s slide into permanent obscurity, but since it is impossible to vaporize everyone the strategy is at best temporary. And his long-term approach, pursued in tandem with the armed drone, is the exercise of true US muscle-power: the Pacific-first strategy draws upon the entire arsenal of military resources, now pivoted to Asia, naval power to the front, for the purpose of cordoning off China so to prevent its military-economic challenge to American dominance. This already appears futile, for without resorting to intervention or war, China has successfully gained entrance into world markets, has an investment record, as in Africa, second to none, and has undertaken massive projects in infrastructure, obviously at home, but also throughout the Third World. Because there is no contest, the Strangelovian juices are flowing in Washington more than ever, augmented by the spirit, Let no opportunity go unnoticed, with Egypt the soft underbelly for a geostrategic push on several fronts at once.

The Egyptian massacres endeared the generals to our own government. They have proven that they can be trusted allies. By the world’s indifference, they have certified open season on Islamists, popularized repression itself as, with its close relative, regime change, preferable to the messiness thought to inhere in democracy, and, highly pertinent, provided America access to expanding its arc of influence to cover critical areas of Europe, Asia, and Africa. With all eyes now on the Pacific, Egypt offers protection on the other flank, the chance to stop the Arab Spring in its tracks, while securing a greater hold on Middle East oil. Italy, Spain, North Africa, only a stone’s throw away, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, within distance of long-range aircraft equipped with nuclear weapons, a veritable feast of hegemonic retention and aspiration! The Egyptian military, however, on its part must earn the respect of Washington, more rather than less bloodletting, as in the summary execution of protesters in government hands, or the skyrocketing rate of casualties who are themselves unarmed. \$1.5 B buys a lot of butchery, money not to be wasted, if the message is to go out: resist the Americanization of the world political-military system at your peril, whether real or imagined jihadist, real or imagined socialist, real or imagined whistleblower who might divulge the secrets of inner fear propelling the drive for global domination. *That* military must succeed, or all militaries will lose status. Coups feed on each other; whom next, in the service of totalitarianism, the ideal ground for the flourishing of advanced/mature capitalism?

My *New York Times* Comment (Aug. 19) on the article discussing Mubarak’s possible release follows:

They will kill us, I know, everybody knows, but it doesn’t matter.” Tawab’s words, his brother killed in Ramses Square shortly before, should haunt the waking hours of all us. We have demonized Islamists as though the West were engaged in a Holy War, preparatory, under the name of counterterrorism and national security, to embark on a bloodbath if not campaign of extermination. Political dialogue is a joke because we want no part of it, and instead, military repression as the sole guide to safety and stability. Safety for whom?



Release of Mubarak would signal to the world, because few outside Egypt would protest, a symbolic step toward ascendant fascistic currents. Militarism has become infectious. The US wraps Sisi's knuckles, but refuses to cut aid. Israel, per your report, is leading a campaign in world opinion on behalf of the Egyptian massacres, exposing itself for what it has become: a pariah state because of its disregard for social decency and the rights of others.

Cynicism reigns supreme in world councils. The little people, like Tawab and his deceased brother, should be what and whom really matter, not ground up in hate-machines and spewed out. It is sad that no one has intervened to stop the massacres, not the UN, not the EU, and, of course, not NATO and the US, who believe the status quo is good for business. How much further slaughter? And why?

AUGUST 22, 2013

### **Murder By Proxy**

Not satisfied with having the largest military budget in the world, the US allocates military assistance to practically any and all who will further its hegemonic purposes. Why dirty our hands directly when we can do so indirectly—as though an Enemy is needed just to keep the momentum of power fueled by hate and fear going? This is an old story, endemic counterrevolution from at least the aftermath of World War II, but now USG bearing down with urgency because the world system no longer blindly serves US interests. The result: up the ante, with drone assassinations, embargoes, interventions, more lethal weapons systems, a China-strategy based on thinly-disguised aggregated force pointed toward containment and isolation, and domestically, the boldest attempt yet in American history by means of surveillance to fuse the National-Security State with its inevitable partner the Police State. All under liberal auspices, Obama's 21<sup>st</sup> century form of fascism, with megabanks, defense contractors, and the Homeland security industry all with their hands out. Secrecy in government, ever the marker for an authoritarian regime, gives the lie to democratic pretensions. This state of affairs would be intolerable to a people aware of and committed to acting on their rights. Instead USG from Obama down expresses contempt for the people satisfied that such contempt will go unchallenged because the people in their docility show contempt for themselves. Ostensive liberalism harnessed to repression disarms potential critics. The wanton killings in Egypt have engendered little protest in America, making our nation, given its financial support to the Egyptian military, complicit in these crimes.

The Egyptian military washes our dirty laundry. Why US interest in Egypt, support for a military coup, and turning a blind eye to verified atrocities—if not for the pursuit of a geopolitical framework in which that country's internal affairs mean little, except as a stable launching pad for America's own ambitions in the region? Egypt is central to the permanent establishment of a US sphere of influence which both secures the full protection of Israel and sustained access to Middle Eastern *oil* on advantageous terms. That much is obvious; less obvious is the framework itself, an American military concentration of energy which permits the supervision, guidance, leadership (whatever term happens to fit the occasion) over a vast area including Southern Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, and creeping further eastward in reinforcing military and diplomatic pressures on China as part of Obama's Pacific-first strategy. Israel is almost forgotten in the Grand Design, one essentially counterrevolutionary in nature, as also in Africa and Latin America, motivated in part by

the failures of globalization and the need, therefore, to prevent and oppose Left popular movements in countries struggling under the burdens of austerity, capitalist dislocations, and increasing trends toward differentiations in wealth on a global scale. Egypt may be only one outpost in the march to remain top-dog in the world system, a system itself fragmenting into competing political economies so that America can no longer assume its political-economic dominance, yet precisely because this shaking down into a multipolar power structure the US will take any launching pad for hegemonic purposes it can. Keeping order is crucial, thus making the Egyptian military a proxy-force of momentous value, enough so to excuse or dream up extenuating circumstances for murder in the name of enlightened rule.

The Times (Aug. 21), in a single sentence, describes the treatment of Morsi, now compared with the anticipated release of Mubarak, in terms that would make Kafka blanch: “Mr. Morsi remains under indefinite detention in an undisclosed location with no access to legal counsel.” This violation of civil liberties is not promising ground for constitutional governance, and raises the suspicion that claims of Morsi’s “overreaching,” heard often in justification of the military coup, and similarly, that the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organization, are part of a campaign of disinformation to smooth the way for the military crackdown of all dissent. Egyptian liberals have not condemned the violence, the closing of Brotherhood media, the arrest of their leaders—even the murder of persons already in police custody. Too much has gone wrong to claim the military is acting on behalf of the people. One senses that the Muslim Brotherhood has become the surrogate for Al Qaeda, in the way that a half-century ago Jews became the surrogate for Communists—strike while the iron’s hot, in the expectation that a chain-reaction will ensue ridding the world of all real and imaginary enemies. When Sartre, in “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” wrote that the Jew was least important to the anti-Semite, who craved the durability of stone, and feared social change, the same might be said for counterterrorism, that the terrorist is of least importance to those stirring up anxieties and fears, whether in Egypt or America, a psychological shell-game on behalf of US hegemony and arresting the popular forces of political-structural-ideological democratization. Those most adept at killing, whether in CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations or the drone “pilots” 8,000 miles from target, in America, or the recipients of US military assistance abroad, get the accolades because proving their value as investments. After thirty years and  $x$  billions, we can see the fruition of our military funding for Egypt in the fatherless children and stacked bodies in the morgues, where ice and fans are needed to halt decay preparatory to burial.

The Egyptian dead and wounded have been marginalized in Western political consciousness. Egypt is a test of anomie and depersonalization, i.e., the absence of outrage—in Egypt and the US—is presumptive evidence that militarism and authoritarianism are ascendant, whether through mass persuasion or force in the world. If the Egyptian military can get away with the slaughter, then so could other militaries when the time is ripe—the power of example, paving the way for the same commission of atrocities, with America impatiently waiting its turn where and when it perceives threats to its national interest. Egypt has given us the *legitimation of force* on a silver platter, but also the legitimation and efficacy of *coups*, no longer hidden from view through covert operations, but out in the open, counting on our collective social blindness. With Mubarak’s planned release, the haughtiness of generals everywhere, confident in their mission of Reaction, is being given a significant boost—the US, as earlier in Brazil and Chile, tickled pink. Mubarak, even under house arrest, vindicates all the political butchers. Washington is concerned with damage control, Tel Aviv

not even that. The generals should be more discreet in their killing. Obama is forced to scramble, more unctuous rhetoric, another slap on the wrist while still delivering the goods.

Is it any wonder that I recur to the phrase, the liberalization of fascism? Militarism is the grand avenue to maintaining hegemony, itself wearing thin around the edges as America's industrial power declines and its structural interior is becoming gutted. No matter, whether school lunches and myriad social needs feel the strains of austerity, so long as the Egyptians have their helicopters and F16s, we can rest safely at night. Every US-trained Latin American death squad, every Egyptian rooftop sniper, "freedom fighters" all, we owe an immense debt of gratitude, or so Obama reminds us, subtly, obliquely, and thus more disingenuously.

My *New York Times* Comment (Aug. 21) to Eric Schmitt's article, "Egyptian Military Is Firmly Hooked to U.S. Lifeline":

The framework, from buying access to bribing Egypt to maintain its 1979 peace treaty with Israel, to cash-flow financing, smells to high heaven. Military assistance per se is disgusting. Its use is for repression of the country's own people, or for "friends and allies" in support of intervention. We know that America spends more for military activities—at least 1/3 the world's total—than any other nation, as meanwhile domestic needs embodied in the social safety net suffer. Screwed-up priorities, an understatement.

Egypt brings the situation out: US aid goes directly to murdering unarmed people, a record truly to be proud of: cold-blooded, cynical, and to what purpose? Must the US militarize global politics, as a way of advancing its political-economic-ideological hegemony? Cairo morgues are filling up. Extend more aid, Mr. Obama, or are you too busy with your Terror Tuesday hit-lists personally authorizing assassinations?

Militarism is an ugly matter; the US will not win any beauty contests.

AUGUST 27, 2013

### **Obama's War Itch**

Humanitarian intervention is the liberalization of aggression, liberalism itself having already poisoned the well with its cant about social welfare and labor rights while force-feeding corporate monopolization and the financialization of capitalism through its policy of deregulation and its shibboleths of market fundamentalism—backed by military intervention determined on global political-economic-ideological hegemony.

Obama waxes eloquent over the casualties of chemical weapons, not a word though of the thousands his personal authorization destined to vaporization through his campaign of armed drones for targeted assassination. I'm suspicious. With a record of war crimes that he seeks desperately to cover up (hence, his obsession to punish and silence whistleblowers), how much can we trust him on Syria, even before UN monitors have reached conclusions?

One does not have to be an apologist for either side in the conflict to know that the US and its European clubbies are thinking and probably soon executing intervention not for the well-being of the Syrian people, but for reasons of US and Western goals which might well extend beyond the

Middle East itself to an all-out confrontation, whether with Islam or China (or both) doesn't seem important, just so long as the militarization of class-rule on an international scale can continue.

If Assad is a (lower-case) hitler, the US does not have clean hands to overthrow him. Dictatorship has become so muddled that, at the very least, atrocities must be proven, and then laid out for the world to see, preparatory to UN action and International Criminal Court proceedings. America's dedication to regime change, beginning with the Korean War, has been continuous for six decades, paralleled by the progressive increase of the military budget under both major parties, so this immediate maneuvering of naval power in the region has to be taken seriously.

In fact, it is wrong to separate Egypt and Syria in policy-making circles—interestingly, no righteous indignation over the military slaughter of the innocent in Cairo (Israel has made the same distinction, promilitary in Egypt, anti-Assad in Syria), as though the same itch for widening conflict.

I've been wrong on many occasions, possibly this one as well, which seems to tilt toward Assad. But when I see the national-security gang gathered around Obama, to a person extremely hawkish, and his personal involvement in assassination (just for starters, as in the way he is moving toward confrontation with China), his zealous regard for things paramilitary (CIA-JSOC operations), his wrapping himself in the flag while sacrificing working people to corporate and banking America, I might be pardoned for thinking that no- good can come out of evil: the evil of betraying principles upon which he was elected, including those found in the Constitution relating to the rule of law (denial of habeas corpus rights and unlawful searches and seizures) to contempt for the general welfare, as in expanding Executive power on many fronts, including the conduct of the military.

If Assad is the villain warranting regime change, what can be said for POTUS, with sticky fingers in every pot auguring poorly for world peace and domestic well-being?

My *New York Times* comment (Aug. 26) on Obama administration deliberations:

The rush to judgment is all too familiar, as in the case of WMD and Iraq. The US track record and its new rallying cry, humanitarian intervention, is rejected by most of the world. Obama and his national-security advisers have a craving for war, whether a distorted view of patriotism or simply courting popularity with a nation careening dangerously to the Right, is a moot point. Also, war is a good distraction from a shabby record on everything from banking regulation to job creation. The Democratic party is hopeless, a profound betrayal of FDR and the New Deal.

This time should there be intervention, world consequences will be frightening. Yet perhaps that is what Washington welcomes, a chance to show toughness and risk the safety of the global population. Anyone for a remake of Dr. Strangelove?

AUGUST 28, 2013

### **Obama Commemorates the March on Washington**

It befouls the memory of Dr. King to have invited Obama to speak. He represents the antithesis of everything Dr. King dreamed of and worked for. Yes, I was there in 1963, where the air was filled with the spirit of justice, justice not as an abstraction, not as a catchword deceive about

interventions abroad and entrenched poverty at home, but justice as the full *democratization* of America, in which racial segregation conveyed the salience of a structure and society grounded in wealth-inequality, ideological themes supporting aggression against the weak, veneration of wealth, and extreme loathing of dissent, and the arrogance of militaristic preeminence as the basis for global leadership.

The themes have not changed; democratization is further away than in 1963. What has changed is, there is no Dr. King now in American life, only the timeservers for militarism and corporate wealth, of which Obama represents the gold standard: “I have a Dream” vs. the Killer of the Dream, indeed, all dreams of social decency and the affirmation of life.

I’d like to return to Dr. King’s speech, but first, if I may, I’d like to set the scene, my introductory note to the speech, in a documentary collection, co-edited with Frank Freidel, shortly after, when the moment was still fresh in my mind:

America witnessed an historic occasion on August 28, 1963. On that day approximately one quarter of a million people, Negro and white, oldtimers in the civil rights struggle such as A. Philip Randolph and high school students from the sit-in demonstrations, men in overalls fresh from the Danville jail and well-dressed professional people from New York and Los Angeles, came to Washington with one common resolve. As the largest living petition in American history, they gathered at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to call for effective civil rights legislation and equal job opportunities.

The mood of the March on Washington was dignified; there was no violence. In this setting, with the people listening to one speaker after another under the hot sun beating down, the expected moment finally came. Dr. Martin Luther King, spiritual leader of the civil rights movement and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, speaking slowly and with a cadence in his voice which caused many to close their eyes and move gently back and forth, articulated the aspirations of all who share his vision of America.

Dr. King’s vision of America transcended race, transcended class, transcended contemporary world politics, sought in the word *brotherhood*, just as did Paul Robeson in his soulful “black or white or tan,” The Purest Kind of a Guy, a unitary humankind without oppression, without wars, without hatreds and petty fears, without, in the final analysis, the domination of one nation, race, group, or individual, over another nation, race, group, or individual. Skipping over the familiar passages, justifiably memorable for their honest eloquence (a trait absolutely foreign to Obama, his cunning, his teleprompter, his speechwriter Rhodes), I want to bring out the power of Dr. King’s uncompromising challenge to America, one that fifty years later perversely seems to have been met and won, yet, I believe not, however much we’ve seen the end of segregation and a black president in the White House.

Honesty clashes with smoke and mirrors, with propaganda, with deceit, as evidenced by having Obama make this address; for the acceptance of blacks in American life has been through the suspension, indeed, the surrender of the autonomy and critical reasoning among blacks themselves which so characterized the authentic striving for dignity and civil rights a half-century ago. Even John Lewis, an esteemed leader of SNCC, continues to honor Obama, despite the latter’s utter disregard not only of the black masses but also of all working people—a blasphemous presidential agenda promoting wealth accumulation among the groups already at the top, the corporate and

banking elite through deregulation, as well as intervention by all means at hand from paramilitary operations and targeted assassination to naval forces in the Pacific confronting China and, of course, the recent war in Iraq and continuing one in Afghanistan.

That barely scratches the surface in this almost studied attempt to reverse, overturn, and extinguish the dream of Dr. King at the Lincoln Memorial. Listen: “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children.”

Whether one speaks of racial justice per se or as the precondition for universalized equality (“all of God’s children”), Obama’s policies which have resulted in staggering differences in wealth, large unemployment, the rape of the social safety net through massive military spending and, as we see in Egypt, military aid to dictators who repress their people, are not hopeful signs of the way to justice *or* equality. Neither is wanted, for both stand in the way of a political consciousness which rules out the slaughter of innocents, surveillance on an unprecedented scale, or cloaking government in extraordinary secrecy.

And further, the beauty of nonviolence, not only as a religious and moral principle, as significant as that is, but also, the steeling of courage to face down the oppressor, the militancy which eschews force and therefore repudiates the entrenched militarism which fuels expansion, intervention, war, and sets the tone for police brutality at home: “Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers as evidenced by their presence here today have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.”

A true biracial (or now multiracial) unity of spirit and action is precisely what is lacking, and precisely what is greatly feared, today because inceptively it carries with it a *class* component which, in turn, could lead to questioning the foundations of power in the United States and penetrate the fakery surrounding the administration’s decision-making, whether on humanitarian intervention, climate change, or the rule of law. An activated populace is the last thing wanted. Dr. King continued: “There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, ‘When will you be satisfied?’ We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways, and the hotels of the cities.... No, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

The stream has been reduced to a trickle, if even that, as drone strikes reign down on women and children, dissent becomes suspect, judicial decisions are tortured reasoning on behalf of powerful interests, and government becomes transmogrified into a war-machine partly for reasons of age-old hegemonic aspirations, partly to ensure the deterioration of living conditions at home, the better to keep the people docile, uncritical, accepting of the fate meted out to them. Dr. King went on to lead a Poor People’s Campaign, in order to actuate his dream; Obama, wholly disconnected from the lives and dreams of the poor, knows only capitalism as the god to be served.

When Dr. King goes on to say, “honor in suffering is redemptive,” Obama retreats to the Vineyard in puzzlement. For him, redemption comes from conquest, from looking the other way at—or actually facilitating—outrageous schemes for gathering wealth, and from successfully receding into the bowels of secretive government, where no Manning or Snowden is allowed to disrupt his vainglorious thoughts of consummate leadership. Dr. King wanted “to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.”

Obama reverses this, converting hope into despair for much of the world’s population, including those at home.

SEPTEMBER 2, 2013

### **Obama’s Congenital Militarism**

We now see, as September opens, a syphilitic mindset in its final stage: Obama’s hankering for WAR to prove and add further support to America’s claims of world superiority and his own manliness and gold-standard patriotism, both the geostrategic and personal goals unworthy, and ensuring the corruption, of a democratic society. Obama, of course, is not *sui generis*, but expresses the main line of US historical development from the close of World War Two to the present, substituting counterterrorism for tried-and-true anticommunism, to the same end of stabilizing capitalism as a world system, within which the American form provides international guidance and control, simultaneous with pursuing the broader agenda of counterrevolution to halt the democratization of societies, as inimical to US interests of trade, investment, and raw-materials acquisition, where- and whenever popular movements and autonomous growth of modernization (particularly if it is socialist) appear.

Obama, the Sentry at the Gate, vigilantly on guard, presides over the militarization of capitalism as the only means, given its mature-bordering-on senescent stage, for continued advancement, a political economy requiring the stimulation of conquest to keep afloat.

So now we have Syria in the political-ideological-military crosshairs, a means for asserting in the face of a changing, multipolar, international system, unilateral dominance through the demonstration of force. And for the first time, America is not having its way. Judging from the response of the British Parliament, the UN, Russia, and even a sprinkling of protest demonstrations throughout America, from the White House gates to John Kerry’s Boston house to LA, with signs showing the acuity previously lacking about Obama’s service to ruling groups and rush to war. That he pauses for Congress to convene betrays a recognition that his high-handed use of Executive Power may politically backfire, itself not enough to stop him in his tracks, but the cool calculated gamble that a positive vote will cover over his brazen use of military power is nonetheless worth the try.

Should the vote go against Obama (unlikely, given the fear of Congress about appearing “soft” on, whatever the enemy of the moment), he may still go ahead, in the knowledge he has the approval of the groups that count, including the intelligence community, and can use his decision to exhibit further strength on behalf of what Veblen rightly termed, the Vested Interests. Giving the orders to attack—more and more self-identified as Commander in Chief rather than as president—has the deliberate effect of rubbing the noses of domestic critics, real and imagined, in the manure

pile of national-security policy. From those of my generation, one sees the Charles Atlas ad, moving from 97-pound weakling to what today we'd call, superhero—the pathetic display of hunger for power descending Air Force One with snappy salute, photo ops with military brass forming the background, and talking tough to other world leaders, meanwhile throwing the mantle of massive surveillance over the American public to invite its silence.

Obama got off to a good start with his Terror Tuesday nights off the Situation Room, hit lists at the ready as he authorized assassination, a practice as incriminating as his looking the other way when rendition, waterboarding, indefinite detention, CIA-JSOC paramilitary activities, placing military “assets” in a state of readiness (now, Syria) are also noted. Together they point to the disposition to commit war crimes, only the specific occasion lacking. Embroilment in a precarious state of world politics will surely follow—and he doesn't seem to care.

Obama “cool” is really nihilism with a smiling face, the moral vacuum that discounts all but personal advancement. When Obama travels to Moscow in coming days, what will he say to Putin—except the attempt to stare him down, and presumably behind him, China's leaders as well? We are farther away from global peace than at any time since Vietnam and the early 1970s. And why? Perhaps one might say that hegemony is in America's DNA, a not implausible idea, but one that still begs the question and is circular. My own suggestion is that American capitalism has been a failure, not in the conventional terms of the maximization of profits for economic upper groups, but in the societal terms of creating fragmentation of the body politic, a nation of sharply increasing disparities of wealth, the need for still heavier doses of police powers and social control to keep the lid on, a reactive political culture wanting to draw blood from working people (not least in winnowing away at the social safety net), and the bread-and-circuses channeling of discontent and potential opposition into the surge of patriotism, militarism, and vicarious assaults on “terrorists,” converting Snowden and Manning into surrogates for al Qaeda.

Thank you, Mr. President, for leading us on the path of fascism; the bunting will be liberal, the content, more interventionism after Syria.

My New York Times Comment to the Baker and Weisman article, “Obama Seeks Approval by Congress for Strike in Syria” (Sept. 1):

The US fetishism of don't show weakness, we will lose the respect and confidence of friends and allies, adversaries, the world, is out of the psychopathic playbook of bipartisan war hawks since the 1950s, Obama merely riding the wave of the militarism clutching at the throat of the American public. Whether the decision to attack Syria is right or wrong, is founded on correct or incorrect intelligence, etc., doesn't matter—we (i.e. POTUS) said we would, and therefore we must, or else lose face. Nonsense. Obama craves war, making this clear by his advisers, such as Brennan, and now Kerry, and his actions, notably, armed drones for targeted assassination. He can't lose with an equally war-crazed Congress: America must prove its power or else magically sink below the horizon. What's really at stake? Obviously a geopolitical posture of global hegemony. Syria is a convenient chip in the poker game of asserting international economic-ideological-military supremacy, with Obama assigning to liberal rhetoric the task of stalking horse, nothing short of the liberalization of fascism: massive surveillance at home, adventurism and conquest abroad—meanwhile, the social safety net left in tatters. And Obama has the nerve to show his face, in



the shadow of commemorating the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's March on Washington. If Dr. King were here, he would lead another March on Washington AGAINST Obama-Democratic war policies and savaging via deregulation working people's future.

SEPTEMBER 4, 2013

### **Dr. King, Obama, and the Run-Up to War**

Less than a week following the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, it is as though, from the standpoint of what Dr. King symbolically represented and actively fought for, and where America, under Obama's leadership, presently is, the nation has altogether forgotten the first in its true magnificence as, more than an appeal for peace and justice, a determined opposition to the Vietnam War and a mobilization of the Poor People's Campaign, and the second, a gross perversion of Dr. King's legacy, a mental numbness of passive acceptance now setting in as the countdown continues to the run-up of a military attack on Syria.

This psychopathic amnesia is expected, given what Obama has already gotten away with, not least, his personal authorization of targeted assassination and his absolute disregard for civil liberties with his campaign of massive surveillance and vengeance toward the whistleblowers who have dared to reveal unconstitutional government practices, hitherto surrounded in secrecy. The commemoration of the March was a misguided falsification of Dr. King's legacy, an affront to the memory of the dead by having invited Obama to speak and thereby bask in the sunshine of the occasion, deriving prestige from Dr. King's goodness, while actively planning war with Syria—and what lies beyond, further confrontation with both Russia and China.

Obama has turned Dr. King's projection of a nation and world founded on brotherhood upside down, a world careening out of course, so badly has he inflamed international politics and, in his quest for US hegemony, brought us to the doorstep of fascism. The festivities marking the event are over, but I should like to recall Dr. King's own statements about American intervention shortly before he was assassinated as possessing a searing criticism of USG policy then, having equal if not more relevance today in virtually every foreign-policy step that Obama has taken, from the modernization of nuclear weaponry to the coordination of CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, from Iraq and Afghanistan to, now, Syria.

First, the premeditated treachery of announcing a red line, which provides the standard, violation of which allows and legitimates retribution on the part of the assigning power—a way of entering a war as though a rescue mission (aka, humanitarian intervention), and thus, selfless, fully justified, a power with spotless hands. Never mind, the source of the violation still remained in doubt when the declaration for intervention was made public (in fact, the chemical-warfare standard applied to Syria was announced months before, as though dropping a precedent for action, a contingency plan for inviting intervention), and efforts at UN investigation and determination were ridiculed by the Obama administration without cause, suggesting no mood to brook opposition—the hegemonic steamroller in progress. No-one had thought to ask, what if the situation was reversed? For that would have implied an unthinkable line of reasoning to the American mindset, so accommodating has it been to Obama's questionable practices and policies.

Specifically, armed drones for targeted assassination—a war crime from start to finish, and if the murdered were tabulated, vaporized on the spot, from thousands of miles away, the victims often unidentified or misidentified, the signature strikes at funerals for the dead or of first responders seeking to aid the victims, they would exceed (but this should not be thought a numbers game!) those killed in the chemical-weapons attack. In these circumstances, what if the Chinese or Russian government took it upon itself to enforce the laws of “international morality” and drew a red line, holding that targeted assassination, the violation of which implicated the United States, warranted a military attack on the perpetrator as presumptive evidence of war-crimes guilt?

I know it is terribly churlish, not to say, unpatriotic, to argue, “What’s good for the goose, is good for the gander,” but perhaps that alone would bring Americans to their senses, i.e., realizing the full impact on ourselves the destruction, tortures, death, we inflict on others. Wouldst one or both drew such a line, on a practice which leaves its victims blood spats and, the drones whirring overhead, terrifying and disrupting the lives of whole communities, in which case, these nations, acting on their own, without UN sanction, and in violation of international law, would bomb, first, the bases, such as Djibouti, and if that did not stop the practice, direct the bombs to The Homeland, where drone-facilities and manufacturing sites exist.

Yes, what’s good for the goose is also good for the gander, and then see how America likes it. It won’t, because living in terror is for someone else, not for Americans, who have already inflicted and continue to inflict misery with impunity on whomever it declares an enemy—world law and world opinion be damned. There is a self-righteous atmosphere, a cloud of morbidity, engulfing the White House, an obsession with power, the disease of aggression as a means of warding off collective self-doubts about inner weakness that all the armaments in the world cannot protect against, the dim or suppressed recognition of a driven society wanting to devour the world’s wealth and power as though a God-given right because of a putative moral superiority based on an equally putative Exceptionalism, the cloak historically thrown around American capitalism to disguise its expansionist policies and hide its exploitative practices and record.

On August 28, Obama said on the PBS “NewsHour” that “We can take limited tailored approaches, not getting drawn into a long conflict,” a statement, probably worked out by Ben Rhodes, repeated ad nauseum in the six days since, in the run-up to a military attack on Syria, assurances, incidentally, so transparently phony that not only has the United Kingdom jumped off the boat, but also usually supine members of Congress are speaking up. Obama, however, remains undaunted, skillfully, unctuously, spilling oil on troubled waters to allay doubts of massive intervention, as he meanwhile waits for the moment to strike.

Now, of course, his luck is changing, still small yet unaccustomed criticism, some now beginning to see through him, necessitating, because he does not respond well to any criticism, tending rather to overreact lest his true self be discovered, primarily for damage control, the turning to Congress in order to legitimate the intervention. Political “wisdom” suggests the move, with a public-relations barrage on the Sunday talk shows by Kerry intended to achieve the desired outcome—intervention once again, hopefully smelling like a rose. This is the most advertised intervention in memory, orchestrated with great care, on the erroneous, morally repulsive grounds, that not to go through with it is a sign of weakness, of losing credibility in the eyes of “friends and allies” and the American public, of the US no longer to be relied on, and horror of all, not attacking

Syria, leaves Israel hanging out to dry, the attack on Syria in reality done as a warning to Iran, the chemical attack by now all but forgotten in the grand game of geopolitics.

The claims of having and then making public the evidence implicating Assad in the chemical attacks appear vacuous to misleading, John Kerry replacing John Brennan as point man for putting a happy face on intended and soon realized war crimes. Kerry is Hillary in pants: nonapologetic, tough-minded, lusting for battle. Obama's "tailored" approach has as usual for its chief component the "surgical strike" beloved of Pentagon and CIA sadists, no matter the target, as, again, in drone warfare, where it is surgical to identify funerals and first responders and keep the "collateral damage" to a minimum—except that "collateral damage" is the name of the game because the strikes are designed to terrorize the people as a whole. (As I write, the people—human beings like you and me—in Damascus are preparing for the worst.) The watchword: Kill in the name of stopping the killing, only killing (1) exceeds killing (2), and in this case, we're not sure who was responsible for the chemical attacks.

Worst case scenario, Assad launched the attack, would that still justify American intervention? Are we the custodians of global virtue, given the US record of interventions, beginning at least with Korea and Vietnam and extending through what is euphemistically termed "regime change," as in Chile, and covert as well as overt operations, the CIA riding high in the saddle, having counterrevolutionary objectives, all showing contempt for and the violation of international law? Chutzpah is the polite term for pretending to voice the concerns of humankind. Yet, this latest intervention, when it comes, may well be the most significant because, with the Manning and Snowden revelations, Obama and the US might well feel they have nothing to lose—the world already knows the score, from killing innocents for sport (the helicopter gunship video) to massive surveillance worthy of an advanced post-Kafka police state.

Why, then, even hold back, when Syria offered the prospect—the ideal setting—for implementing what had tactfully been for a short time (the image of paragon while shaping and leading coalitions of the faithful) kept muted, a striving unilateralism having obvious global-hegemonic aims in all relevant categories of power, from military, political, and economic, to ideological and cultural. One significance of this intervention is the flagrant notice to the UN that America regards it as obsolete, indeed a roadblock to America's rightful guardianship of world stabilization and its own prosperity. But more, as even Pentagon "experts" now point out, Obama risks a widening conflict, not merely the tinderbox that the Middle East has become, but a conflict which draws in the Great Powers. Fittingly, he doesn't care. His word is sacred, even if the whole world comes crashing down.

The rally-around-the-flag mentality that will support him once the die is cast, poignantly reveals how far we have drifted as a nation and as a people. War will seem like just another bowl game, so long as one does not dare cheer for the other side. (Welch's statement to Joe McCarthy flashes to mind: "Sir, have you no shame?") Has the nation, now, no shame? What hurts me, personally, because of my strong feelings for Dr. King, and the times we crossed paths in demonstrations, a period, perhaps because the injustice was so manifest, that America, by recognizing it, was a better place, a place of Schwerner-Cheney-Goodman, giving their lives in Philadelphia, Mississippi, a place of selfless protest on behalf of genuine democracy, is that Obama, the same day that he commemorates the March on Washington on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, gives, hours apart, a string of lies about "tailored approaches" to the attack (in my book, especially in light of the

overcrowding of refugees in Damascus, political murder), and delivers a speech platitudinous even by his standards.

I wish that all would personally take offense, this juxtaposition of Dr. King and Obama in mind, and how vile the policies of the latter are. This would go into domestic policy as well, wherein Dr. King gave his life in leading the Poor People's Campaign, while Obama smooches with the megabankers and is on the eve of appointing Larry Summers as head of the Federal Reserve—but that whole area, itself intimately connected to the Syrian intervention, must wait upon another time.

Mark Mazzetti and Mark Landler, in their NYT article, “U.S. Facing Test on Data to Back Action on Syria” (Aug. 29), in addition to showing how the administration is already downplaying the quality and quantity of the evidence to be presented (even the setting, unlike Powell's staged performance on Iraqi WMD, would be routine and low-keyed to avoid memories of the earlier lying and faulty intelligence), had this important sentence bearing on the utter amorality of the situation (although they did not draw this conclusion): “But even without hard evidence tying Mr. Assad to the attack, administration officials asserted, the Syrian leader bears ultimate responsibility for the actions of his troops and should be held accountable.”

By precisely that reasoning, Obama should have been hauled before the International Criminal Court for targeted assassinations, waterboarding, and a thousand-and-one cases of “collateral damage,” a list continuing to expand, and from a man who claims to be walking in the footsteps of Dr. King, who would have pronounced Obama the enemy of humankind analogous to his criticism of US leadership during the Vietnam War. When over the weekend the administration gave a briefing to members of Congress, only some eighty showed up, and, from reports, the evidence pointing to Assad was flimsy to nonexistent. Smoke and mirrors, Kerry on the talk-show circuit, Obama working the phones, together the sincerity and credibility of snakeoil salespersons offering Brooklyn Bridge to the newly arrived.

Remember, Dr. King said (this would be applicable to Obama on Syria): “The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government.” And again: “If America's soul becomes totally poisoned part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It [America's soul] can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over.” One such hope is to live in peace—and Obama's compulsive warriors (aka, national-security advisers), and their humanitarian-intervention racket, are making that impossible. It is shameful that Obama was invited to speak at the commemoration of the March, in the very shadow of war preparation (now, Syria, whom next?). Here is Dr. King, whose words should send the whole Washington caboodle to Hades: “War is not the answer. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world—a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight.”

Welcome, to the Obama administration, wholly bereft of compassion, morality, and sight, although possessing in abundance power, might, and strength—as the missile-firing destroyers off Syria attest. Casualties, wholly beside the point, so long as the response is robust, building confidence that America keeps its word whenever it plans to attack. One should not hold one's breath about the possibility of Congressional disapproval, John McCain, on September 2, stating for

the cameras that although he would prefer stronger action, Congress cannot withdraw support from POTUS here, lest it send a signal to the world that America is weak, lacks resolution, implicitly, is sinking. Stand up, and fight, together cheerleaders for war; and to the extent McCain has counterparts in the Democratic party (he assuredly does), we see brought out not for the first time its moral bankruptcy and that of its leaders. We see also the perhaps more ambitious vision and version of hegemony than at any time before, in response to an American capitalism beginning to totter, consumed by the greed of its upper groups and its ideological-political suffusion of militarism.

My New York Times Comment (Aug. 29) on editorial raising questions about the Syrian intervention:

One wonders what would happen if the US were brought before the Security Council on charges of targeted assassination, surely a violation of international law and responsible for killing more people than the chemical attacks in Syria. Let's clean our own Augean stable before mounting yet another unlawful intervention, however "surgical" the operation. Two intriguing points: why Obama's rush to judgment (as though a personal addiction to war and the use of force), and, perhaps more basic, stated in the editorial's final sentence, does military action have "a broader strategic purpose"? The first I leave to others, although my own reading of his character is that he has a craving for power tied in with traits displayed in both his political ascent and the way he has ingratiated himself with key communities, such as banking, intelligence, and military. The second, however, deserves further thought; for, as with Egypt (here backing military repression), he seeks US regional hegemony in the Middle East as a launching pad for tighter control over Southern Europe, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and, farther afield, for applying pressure on China and Russia.

The US is fishing in troubled waters, for reasons which are hardly above suspicion. From Egypt and Syria to Obama's foreign-policy signature, the "pivot" to the Pacific, and therefore, the containment of China, seems a direct progression to this observer.

SEPTEMBER 6, 2013

### **International Criminal Court and Beyond**

Pretend with me a scenario of manifest justice, though the furthest thing from reality, in light of world political-military foundations of power. The time, two weeks hence; the occasion, US missile attacks on Syria; the American reception, strident chest-pounding in Congress, mass cheering at all college and professional football games that weekend; the ambient political culture, cries of "traitor" directed to critics, moral assurances from all quarters of American humanitarianism and greatness; the ultimate result (here my fantasy kicks in), international condemnation, General Assembly votes of censure, the ICC-issued subpoena commanding Barack A.S. Obama to appear before the Court (A.S., not to confuse with others of the same name, designating two of his most obvious identifying marks, Assassination and Surveillance), and a verdict of guilty of murder, murder disguised as the pursuit of the American national interest. If the planets were aligned and Justice ruled the world, here fantasy would be converted into fact.

Obama stated at a news conference in Sweden (Sept. 4), "I didn't set a red line. The world set a red line." No despot in recorded history could have said it better—not, I am the State; no, I am the world, miniaturized in my own person. I speak for humanitarian intervention, absent all the individuals vaporized through my authorized drone strikes (and even then, probably terrorists masking as women and children), absent too the ones killed for sport from helicopters, imprisoned via indefinite detention, disappeared via covert operations, tortured, its leading advocate now my CIA director, in sum, the form of humanitarianism—my present National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, will attest to this—best conducing to whatever is necessary for United States supremacy in international trade, politics, military affairs, and ideological values (i.e., capitalism as the sole determinant of Way of Life). And these, please note, do not question or qualify humanitarian intervention (as the term "absent" might suggest), for in every case America is self-evidently in the right—a proposition that holds true for whatever America does, killing for sport, e.g., warning others, by that example, that God has chosen the US for executing His/Her will, being the duty that flows from hegemony. Now, the world breathlessly awaits US action in Syria, by his reckoning, Good v. Evil, as the carrier Nimitz and its battle group sail into position, and a battleship lies in waiting in the Red Sea—all to prove Obama is a man of his word? Hardly, though his uncontrolled ego cannot be gainsaid.

For America, Syria is a pawn on the geostrategic chessboard, its concern over chemical weapons—still no convincing evidence pointing to the Assad regime—pathetically fraudulent for a nation that not so long ago used napalm (itself a chemical weapon) indiscriminately and promiscuously in Vietnam (the photograph of the young girl fleeing, her body in flames, should be etched into the conscience of the world—and should have prevented the high-octane patriotism of Kerry and Hagel, both Vietnam veterans, in their Foreign Relations Committee testimony supporting, Sept. 3, the new intervention) and now practices assassination, POTUS right in there with his hit lists, on a regular basis. The hearing, in which the chair, Sen. Menendez, a Democrat, in his introductory remarks had prejudged Obama's call for the military attack vital to the national interest, and practically equated dissenters from that view with traitors, was sickening. Kerry's testimony, however, was like Charlie McCarthy (to those old enough to remember Edgar Bergen and his puppet) scripted by Brennan-Rhodes-Donilon, ringing the charges of every Cold War platitude tied together by the Domino Theory—if we don't stop Syria, watch out for Iran, North Korea, whomever is hiding under the rug.

Let's drop the guise of fantasy—Obama will never be indicted for war crimes, America will not surrender its hegemonic claims and the means to their continued achievement, nuclear modernization increasing lethality will continue apace, China will remain Obama's primary military-strategic focus, Russia will be reintroduced into the Cold War ideological framework as a supplementary consideration, surveillance will not abate, class-differentials of wealth and power will not lessen, and, if anything, grow, Snowden and Manning will still be thought unpatriotic (the communists of our time)—business as usual. If only the International Criminal Court had jurisdiction, or, as I think will happen, the attack on Syria will so enflame world opinion that, "friends and allies" dropping away, the US will become recognized as a pariah nation, having little to show for its Exceptionalism but interventions, surveillance, capitalism a runaway system of cyclic fluctuations and deepening hardship and suffering.

My New York Times Comment on its editorial rationalizing the use of military force in Syria (Sept. 4):

The international community's attempt to deter further chemical weapons atrocities in Syria is far from over." What if the international community should attempt to deter further drone warfare for targeted assassination ATROCITIES in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Afghanistan by the United States? How can NYT be so one-sided and myopic, neglecting decades of American intervention, and, in recent years, outright torture, rendition, covert campaigns of regime change...and blanket surveillance in an attempt to prevent the disclosure of these war crimes? Aren't you suspicious of a POTUS who shows contempt for civil liberties, and who treats the Syrian intervention as though selling a used car—with all the public relations worthy of a huckster? The Foreign Relations Committee hearing revealed national leaders playing the patriotism tune ad nauseum, always overlooking the carnage left by American intervention. "Shock and awe" should have left the whole bunch under indictment for war crimes, and now, people, yes, civilians, scrambling around in Damascus, in fear for their lives, waiting for Obama to pronounce their death sentence. Has The Times lost its moral compass?

SEPTEMBER 10, 2013

### **Precedent for Dictatorship**

#### **Preliminaries: US Geopolitics, Capitalism, Syria**

Obama's movement toward war, simultaneously making a pitch to Congress, as though going through the motions for the sake of legitimacy, in domestic affairs (i.e., supposedly satisfying Constitutional requirements and principles), while, except for the lame arguments of humanitarian intervention and a threat to America's national interest, is vulgarizing the interpretation of international law. Obama appears to be doing so in order to gain exemption from the valid charge of *war crimes* and outright contemptuously repudiating the status and power of the United Nations, in particular, by-passing the need for Security Council approval for war is, "cute," sinister, sadistic, and usurping by far, far more dangerous in the precedent he is creating for arbitrary (domestic) and unilateral (international) actions than anything that had been done by Reagan, Clinton, and Bush I and II.

Obama drank the poisons of hegemony, liberating a gut-militarism and psychopathic self-glorification in both cases capable not only of subverting the Constitution through the rearrangement of government powers but also of bringing the world crashing down. He has become, in the context of a seemingly localized police action which has unlimited possibilities for expansion itself, and as a geostrategic foot-in-the-door for confrontation via a strong presence in the Middle East with both China and Russia, a menace. Period.

One cannot help but believe that Team Obama (with John Kerry taking a surprisingly prominent role, and Susan Rice, as the Madam Chiang-Kai-shek of our time), frustrated in Iraq and Afghanistan, have actually welcomed Syria as the new venue for the display of American power! The thirst for hegemony is too great for these Kissinger-Strangelove wannabes to resist *manufacturing a crisis* which, despite the internal problems and dislocations of American

capitalism, or perhaps because of them, places the US military in a position of world supremacy. What capitalism lacks, militarism rounds out the cluster of attributes for global power.

It is evident that Obama is on a rampage, itself a sure sign of desperation, militarily finding consummation for a personal arrogance resting on insecurity, and for that reason, as well as ideological conviction, throwing his full weight on the side of a consolidated financial structure as the forward edge of American capitalism. Attack Assad, appoint Summers, inseparable elements of an unbalanced mindset seeking, through the financialization and militarization of American capitalism, the ego-satisfaction of one clutching for tangible expressions of strength. Obama is the wrong man, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, a manifestly unqualified POTUS (but aren't they all?), who, unlike FDR, cannot, and appears not to want to, bring America out of economic crisis through policies of increasing employment, achieving basic human needs, and addressing problems of conservation and infrastructure (comparison with FDR and the New Deal not out of place precisely because even government innovation and judicial activism did not, as now, wrench the Constitution out of its moorings).

It is no coincidence that counterterrorism, surveillance on a massive scale, targeted assassination, and a Pacific-first strategy to isolate and contain China are, as it were, joined at the hip under Obama, because together they define a unified pattern which helps to make the military attack on Syria explicable. It is America against the rest of the world, a broadly conceived counterrevolutionary ideology, geopolitical strategy, and military posture, nominally in the name, *for* now, of opposing terrorism, but integral to the long-term course of American capitalist development fearing the dangers and weakness of senescence, and fending them off through more aggressive international conduct.

If it turns out that rebel forces in Syria were responsible for the chemical attack, Obama and the US would find a face-saving device still to proceed under some other pretext, or quickly open a new front of military activity. The Strangelovian juices are flowing; any obstruction to their flow would imperil “credibility” as the sine qua non of US Exceptionalism, greatness, and the self-justifying mantra, humanitarian intervention. When the latter is raised, Watch out world.

### **That's Not Who We Are: A Genocidal Rhapsody**

I can still remember, as a child, a cartoon in the early 1940s, in which Hitler, arms in swirl, screams out, “If what I say isn't true, may God...”—and people running away every direction. Similarly when Obama says, as recently as September 6, departing from St. Petersburg, about Assad's putative use of chemical weapons, and America's own resolute moral opposition, “That's not who we are as a people,” one does the same, *run for cover*, lest one get struck by lightning bolts from Heaven as a sign of God's displeasure because of the manifest lie. Obama is good at them. Fortunately, napalm is classified as a defoliant, not as a chemical weapon, as tons of this inflammable chemical poured down on the Vietnamese people in the US scorched earth policy of murderous execution.

Today, we have the “surgical strike” that replaces carpet bombing, only somehow large numbers of civilians are killed indiscriminately, anyway, with the armed drone for targeted assassination unctuously pronounced not in violation of international law or moral decency—and, at this moment, B52 and Stealth bombers, along with the carrier Nimitz and its battle group, and a battleship delicately parked in the Red Sea, all poised for a, *what*, surgical strike? A bunch of cut-throats like



this, dressed in proper Washington legalese, we haven't seen, even under Bush II, where gut-Reaction is now being replaced by an antisepticising fascism which wipes away all traces of moral scruple, in the name of humanitarian intervention.

Obama is truly a study. He turns to Congress for approval, thinking this pro forma maneuver cleanses his bloody hands (thank you Medea Benjamin and CodePink for raising those red hands signifying blood in the congressional hearings!), which approval, at present writing, may not work, as Members receive an earful from home—and yet for Obama it doesn't matter because he plans to go ahead with military action anyway, whatever Congress says or does. Cynicism, arrogance, growing Executive Power, they together make for a heady brew. More disturbing, however, is America's public announcement that it will reign down death on the Syrian people, hour-by-hour intensification of agony for them, as Obama plays his war game, each postponement, such as votes in Congress, adding to his own sense of arbitrary power—and I suspect, pleasure.

Too harsh? How explain a POTUS who on Terror Tuesdays, surrounded before by Brennan, now Rice, and national-security advisers who, to a person, are committed to a policy of regularized assassination, not only along with Obama, but at his *personal* authorization, in which the very whirring sound of the drones overhead is seen as turning the screws in the campaign of terrorizing the civilian population, each fearful of the missile strike crashing down on their homes in the middle of the night (we know this from the Stanford-NYU law faculties' study, based on on-site interviews), and Obama, at the same time, bleating, "that's not who we are as a people"? Too harsh? Does sadism get a free pass? Apparently so, in light of the absence of criticism, especially in the most respectable voices of the mass media. Perhaps, for once, Obama has crossed an imaginary red line of another kind and of his own making in which the American public is beginning to wake up to the barbarism practiced in its name *and* with its previous approval.

This march to war, a self-advertisement of American hegemony, has to do with everything *but* chemical weapons. As I've noted in a previous *CP* article, Syria is a pawn on the chessboard of power politics, yet, to put a finer point on the analysis, it is America's stepladder for getting back up to a unilateral position of world supremacy as, in fact, the global geopolitical structure is rapidly moving away from American political-economic-military dominance through evolving into a multipolar system of power based on the simultaneous weakening of US capitalism and the rising industrial-financial potential of China and Russia and emerging contenders like Brazil. Straws in the wind, just this past week: Obama's failure to receive the approval of the Group of 20 for America's war plans, his failure to get the UK on board, and Putin's direct, no-nonsense statements about the violation of international law.

Things are happening fast in world politics, as though there was already widening receptive ground for what might otherwise have seemed an adventitious factor (but what was bound to come about when a government, in the excesses of secrecy, was committing illegal acts): the revelations of Manning and Snowden, political dynamite in blowing the lid on America's "democratic" practices. The world was invited to see the commission of war crimes, nations—and particularly their leaders, from Germany to Brazil—eavesdropping on their plans and policies, and, perhaps most shattering, the massive surveillance on Americans themselves, suggesting the government's contempt for its own citizenry. If USG steamrollers over the civil liberties of its people, how can others take its word about anything? Not surprisingly, we hear a hue and cry over credibility, as though making up for lost ground.

Obama's red line, though political savagery of the first water, becomes twisted into the moral rectitude of keeping our word—even though that word signifies the death and destruction of others. The false oath of a bully here ascends to the heights of democratic principle—with the new puppet on the block, John Kerry, slinging hash to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on America's moral-humanitarian obligation to serve the world.

The Manning-Snowden revelations achieved more for the hoped-for rescuing of American democracy than perhaps anything since the civil-rights struggle and the Vietnam antiwar protests, because there is now no longer any excuse for passivity as America eases into a posture of militarized capitalism borne of desperation at finding itself compelled to share the sought-after objectives of the international system, markets, investments, raw materials, particularly oil, with major industrial nations which themselves are showing greater flexibility with, and in some cases advancing the interests of, Third World countries, in addition to experiencing sustainable rates of growth of their own the envy of the US.

Unilateralism has made America too sure of itself, to the point of hubristic self-indulgence, if not a downright messianic complex of universal faith-giver, either way, backed by military prowess, the "faith" being unrestrained capitalism under American guidance and leadership. Why Manning-Snowden importance? Primarily because, on behalf of presumably normalizing globalization, the US will go to any lengths to maintain military superiority in the world and the destruction of critical thinking and analysis that could lead to societal democratization at home. To have the prevailing framework of widening class-differentials of income, wealth, and power, matched by the diminution of scope and benefits of the social safety net, all coupled with deregulation of banking, now-endemic unemployment, the erosion of the manufacturing base, failure to address climate change, and a gnawing increase of poverty over and beyond differences of class and status, requires a concerted dumbing down of the populace.

Welcome, surveillance, a clear first step in the conversion from monopoly capital to fascism. Perhaps the horrendous revelations come too late. Whether the Left is a slumbering giant or a concubine in the corporatist harem, coming events in the premeditated Obama-inspired attack on Syria may tell. It is now wake-up time for the world.

### **Presidential War Powers**

Charlie Savage, in a *New York Times* article, "Obama Tests Limits of Power in Syria Conflict" (Sept. 9), has an excellent discussion of the dangers raised by Obama's claims to Executive Authority, as in making war with or without Congressional authorization, and the grounds offered for exercising this power, wholly problematic, arbitrary, convenient on his part (although Savage does not quite go this far). The Obama strategy is to give the intervention a limited character *a la* Kosovo and Libya (neither of which bears out his own characterization), and thus allay concerns of a protracted conflict and the possible embroilment of the whole region, including Israel, in sectarian violence, territorial disputes, and worse—the "worse" being confrontation of the Great Powers, first, through proxy wars, and then, directly, risking the use of nuclear weapons.

Tinderbox, for the Middle East, is too mild a description—although Obama appears bent on gambling with the world's future, credibility, in this case, signifying, who blinks first. Yet, this is, as Savage points out, the immediate level, gaining congressional authorization on the domestic front. He continues, in an encompassing sentence: "On another level, the proposed strike is unlike

anything that has come before—an attack *inside* the territory of a sovereign country, *without* its consent, without a *self-defense* rationale and without the authorization of the *United Nations Security Council* or even the participation of a *multilateral* treaty alliance like NATO, and for the purpose of punishing an alleged war crime that has *already* occurred rather than preventing an *imminent* disaster.” (Italics, mine)

I have italicized words in the statement to point up the obvious—together, a precedent is being set, one which ignores or violates international law and/or established practices at every turn: abridgement and rejection of another nation’s sovereignty, disregard for the UN and even NATO, as a primal unilateralism signaling to the world claims of pre-eminence and arrogating to America, indeed, America alone, a right to define the rules of international politics and conduct as it sees fit, including, finally, designating as war crimes what and when—here timing is important—are viewed to be inimical to US interests.

The two may appear as “contrasting moves” (Savage), “a political role for Congress domestically while expanding national war powers on the international stage,” but only if Obama actually sought Congress’s approval, rather than what those around him readily admit, full speed ahead on spurious grounds, although to him and them, not spurious because in his infinite wisdom, and the rubber-stamping of the DOJ’s White House Office of Legal Counsel, its function under Bush (John Yoo), and now Obama (Kathryn Ruemmler), being to provide memos sanctioning what in the first place has already been decided, POTUS will have the leeway to act with impunity. This is exactly what is now happening, with Ruemmler—a name new to most of us—sanctioning presidential military action practically as inhering in the office, and by definition as lawful, whether in domestic or international law, whatever Congress and the Security Council might say.

The “by definition” is a way of saying, departures of policy and practice, as in the preparatory work of Obama and Brennan in seeking not simply legal justification (national-security presumed necessity for one, just-war doctrine, for the other) about the program of armed drones for targeted assassination, but more important, how to bind future administrations to its operations can be, and here are, intentionally sought precisely for establishing precedent, i.e., Obama’s dramatic extension of Executive Power, in which military intervention and domestic surveillance form a happy marriage on which to build national power.

Of course, Obama in 2008 either misled the public by coming out in opposition to a presidential authorization of military force unless the nation faced an actual or imminent threat, or, what is doubtful, had a sea-change of constitutional interpretation and understanding of the nature of leadership, both of which belie his tendency from that campaign on self-righteously to betray those announced principles. As Savage notes, by 2011 and with Libya all caution about limited presidential war powers were thrown to the wind, his Office of Legal Counsel arguing that “it was lawful for him to unilaterally order American forces to bomb Libya because of national interests in preserving regional stability and in supporting the ‘credibility and effectiveness’ of the Security Council.” True, there was a Council approval of the NATO intervention, but not the authorization of Congress, yet acting for the credibility and effectiveness of the former is chutzpah to the nth degree, while by-passing Congress makes the present exercise of the same character.

In the present case, we see Ruemmler to the rescue, the legalization of military attacks because regional instability and the use of chemical weapons affect “important national interests”—never

mind, how the attacks might very well foster regional instability, and how concern over chemical weapons seems false in light of their use by American forces in Vietnam.

Obama, however, does not need legal memos from OLC because he increasingly employs humanitarian intervention as the catch-all answer to all objections to US interventions. (Between Rice and Samantha Power at the UN, who was abrupt and defiant in her recent speech there on the murder of children, he does not need a Greek chorus to sound the charge, although the administration's propaganda blitz over the weekend should itself arouse suspicions that a Goebbels-like approach is meant to substitute for meaningful discussion and debate.) And with each of his insinuating remarks on the effete-ness of the Security Council in not "enforcing international norms and international law," he is also provocatively taking on Russia as, with its veto, the "barrier" to this goal. Let's give the last word to Ms. Ruemmler: While attacking Syria "may not fit under a traditionally recognized legal basis under international law," still it is "justified and legitimate," and not prohibited, due to the novel factors involved.

Yes, novel factor, an invocation we may hear in the future, each time presidential power becomes its own source of legitimation.

*This article is dedicated to Gabriel Kolko, to whom the world Left owes so much for his research, writings, and social activism.*

SEPTEMBER 20, 2013

### **The Flatulent "Left"**

Systemic criticism of Obama—in fact, *all* criticism, political, economic, ideological, environmental, etc.—is, on the part of liberals (running true to form) and so-called progressives (a bitter disappointment), like water running off a duck's back.

Clinging to illusions, evidence at every turn to the contrary, that he is a fighter for social democracy, champion of the working people, force for international peace (again, etc.), or even, more modestly, holding the line against an intransigent Congressional Right, standing up to the banks, proposing and enforcing regulations of the business system, ensuring that all Americans have jobs and decent health care and that polluters are driven (like FDR's money-changers) from the temple, liberals and progressives are willfully blind, labor under the ideological narcotic of false consciousness, and, like it or not, are the Swiss Guard of the Vested Interests, working hand-in-glove, by their silence or acquiescence, with those who advocate for unrestrained, amoral, and yes, imperialist, capitalism. It appears that nothing short of the administration's indulging in a nuclear spat will pull the wool from their eyes, and perhaps not even then.

When I say the "Left," I mean, of course, its *inauthentic* realization, which includes upwards of 95% of the Democratic party (I hope the remaining 5% will soon leave on principle), but also the large numbers of Americans who, by rights, from historical experience and their own social struggles, should know better, having traditionally borne the brunt of racial oppression, antiunion legislation and strikebreaking, McCarthyism and other forms of red-baiting designed to penalize and purge dissent, and yet practically grovel at Obama's feet, offering the lame excuse, when not positively praising him, that he represents the lesser of two evils.

Blacks succumbed right away on the grounds both of racial solidarity and mistaken faith (I am especially chagrined at John Lewis and his likening Obama to Dr. King, insulting to the latter in *every* respect, but also most members of the Black Caucus, who have supported Obama on economic policies and military interventions alike), remaining wholly oblivious to Obama's strengthening of class-differentials, particularly hurtful to blacks, in which a practically infinitesimal proportion of the population enjoys an ever-increasing share of income, wealth, and power *directly* through his policies and appointments. With the old Robert Rubin crowd of deregulators, Geithner and Summers, installed on Day One, some of us knew at once the jig was up. Is it unfair to single out blacks? I think, no—there were too many sacrifices in the civil rights movement (Lewis, greatly to his credit, among them) to allow such fraudulence to go unanswered.

What we need is a *color-blind* political epistemology, in which it is recognized that upwardly mobile blacks are no different than upwardly mobile whites, both showing a proneness to reactionary ideas and policies in order to ingratiate themselves to the (mostly white) power structure. Obama is as far removed from Paul Robeson or Thurgood Marshall on every indicator of moral decency (the gold standard of which might be Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign) as am I from Albert Einstein or any other human being of exceptional intelligence.

But why single out any group, when his support takes in much of the FDR-New Deal coalition and its modern counterparts? I am not advocating for a revolutionary Left, at least not in public (and not in earshot of the NSA, FBI, and CIA, whereby mass surveillance in the name of counterterrorism will be increasingly turned in the direction of antiradicalism at home, as foreign policy itself increasingly takes on China, Russia, and heretofore Third World countries rapidly industrializing), but I do think rejection of Obama must be the minimum litmus test of the genuine progressive, whom—without quibbling over definitions (an age-old malady of the sectarian Left)—one can comfortably term sufficiently critical of capitalism, hegemonic plans and aspirations, military preparations and the interventions to which they lead, indifference to job creation, mortgage foreclosures, and entrenched poverty, and not least, the expansion of Executive Power and a POTUS intimately involved in targeted assassination, as to qualify. In a better day or thoroughly-achieved political democracy, Obama's record would be seen as repugnant to humankind.

The recent shooting-down of the Summers appointment as Fed chair *may* signal Obama's reversal of fortunes, that coupled with his foreign-policy unilateralism (which even in the US is starting to meet resistance), so that, finally, the American public will begin to realize they have a Judas Iscariot at the top, who has betrayed not merely his campaign promises, but his pledge of faith to the Constitution down the line, from civil liberties to making war, and in ever-widening circles, the poor, the national estate (as FDR would phrase it), and democracy itself. Just today (September 18) we see in the *New York Times* the confusions surrounding Obamacare, an excellent article by Sharyl Gay Stolberg, whose title says it all, "Ex-Officials Are Reaping Profit After Assisting on Health Law," in which his team constructs a law favorable to the Health Industry and then, through the revolving door, proceeds to join the interests to be regulated, and an editorial, "The Money Behind the Shutdown Crisis," which implicitly takes Obama's program at (liberal) face-value, chastising the Far Right for attacking it, using the threat of a government shut-down as pretext for eliminating it.

The Far Right has myopia, in failing to see the whole thrust of Obama's militarization and financialization of capitalism; nothing coming from his hand should be objectionable to them, or rather, given their own Neanderthalish character, nothing, that would be objectionable to sophisticated corporate capitalism.

Whether or not corporate capitalism breaks from its shock troops because of their dysfunctional positions more suitable to a less advanced or mature stage of capitalism, only time will tell—but plebeian fascism and corporatism, whatever their nuances and differences, smell just as bad. And Obama is the traffic cop du jour presently assisting both, one, with targeted assassination and rah-rah militarism, the other, with slick policies of trade, taxation, subsidies, free-market economics, and the ever-mammoth military budget. A three-legged stool—he, protofascists, mega business and banking leaders, all committed to punching holes in the social safety net and preserving the hierarchical nature of the social order.

My *NYT* Comment (Sept. 18) on the editorial:

The situation is difficult to grasp, as though signifying an alarming rightward shift of the political-ideological spectrum in America, in which the Obama White House, Center-Right in my estimation, has somehow been relegated to the Far Left by forces, e.g., the groups mentioned in the editorial, truly on the cusp of fascism. The three most insightful words in the editorial, “feed on chaos,” reveal the danger they hold: internal terrorists, who can do more damage to society, viz. the breakdown of government, than those we normally designate by that term. What is so odd about our times is that Obamacare itself is well to the Right of world developments in health care. And coming on the heels of the editorial, we see the article on the revolving-door precisely of those who worked to shape it now becoming “strategic advisers” to the mega health insurers who will most profit from it.

Health care, to me, represents the moral bankruptcy of Obama and his administration. Instead of fighting for a single-payer system, which, if the effort failed, still would have opened the way for the public option, Obama declared both off limits, leaving the American people with a cash cow for the Health Industry. Like his authorization of targeted assassination, in the realm of a national system of health insurance, he has assassinated the public he was pledged to serve. We need a new cabinet position: Department of the Revolving Door.

My *NYT* Comment (same date) on the Stolberg article:

The chickens come home to roost. Of course, the revolving door; of course, policy advisers leaping to the other side. Obamacare was a fraud from Day One, when the White House Health Care Summit was turned over to the very groups it allegedly was designed to regulate. Even the word “regulation” is totally out of place in an administration pledged, among its insiders, but not the public, to deregulation of all things—whether banking, climate change, gun control, or, as here, the health care industry. At that Summit, groups favoring the single-payer system (and even the public option) were excluded or, as in the case of Physicians for Social Responsibility, picketing outside, were allowed two entrants—on condition they remain silent.

Obama has flim-flammed the nation, as on so much else, and yet, because forces to his Right view him as Far Left, we have in America such a complete distortion of the meaning of democracy that anything Center-Right (for there is little around further Left) is seen as communistic. And the Far Right has become the new Center. The “strategic advisers” simply bided their time, first, proving to the Health Industry that they had engineered a law favorable to them, and then, cashing in through inner-expertise and what used to be called (and should again) influence-peddling. A sorry state all-around.

**SEPTEMBER 23, 2013**

**Obama, Putin, and World Politics**

It is now September 20<sup>th</sup>, ten days after Obama addressed the nation on the administration's Syrian policy. In the preceding run-up to his bombing of Syria's chemical-weapons facilities and installations, an all but certain event, a storm of protest broke out in the US and abroad which necessitated second thoughts on the project. Hence, the speech, in which Obama was found shimmying his way through a minefield of his own creation. His call to war, in which comparatively few came, left him temporarily hung out to dry before going it alone in taking military action against Syria. Perhaps for the first time, the public and Congress raised significant opposition—whether or not for the most cogent reasons—to a policy of intervention, to which otherwise they invariably gave their blessing, in several decades. This was an unexpected ideological slap in the face to the nation itself, fed as it has been on a steady diet of militarism and mesmerized by the bullying mantra, “credibility,” that assuaged all doubts about killing innocent civilians. America's stake in hegemony, a unifying force in the body politic, was abruptly up-ended.

Yet, ten days later, the Obama Team, smarting at the suspension and/or delay of its murderous design (for there is no other way to characterize the unprovoked bombing of another country to which one is not at war), is trying—with the help of the media—to have it both ways. David Sanger's apt phrase in his article, “Quick Turn of Fortunes as Diplomatic Options Open Up With Syria and Iran,” *New York Times* (Sept. 20), “selective coercion,” is meant to suggest that had not Obama threatened the bombing, Syria and Iran would not have made the accommodations they did. Force wins the day! Obama is the master strategist who deserves credit for resounding diplomatic victories. But what if Team Obama—Kerry, Rhodes, Rice, Power, among them, and the boss himself—don't want that kind of victory, and instead favor unilateral acts of war to provide certainty for American geopolitical global strategy? Even with the seeming diplomatic triumph—quite premature in Iran's case, because it expects prior steps, e.g., lifting the embargo and also facilitating Iranian money transfers through the Swift system, as the precondition for fruitful negotiations—Obama still has not surrendered the military option, as he makes clear at every opportunity (basking in the strength-as-virtue limelight), with Kerry, especially, painting a dark cloud of skepticism if not disbelief around the apparent thaw, or non-necessity for military action.

The thaw may ultimately prove deceptive, Obama ever chafing at the bit to prove his militarism and soldierly determination, to the American people, US “friends and allies,” of course, our “adversaries,” and the hordes of terrorists lurking in the wings, indispensable for justifying massive surveillance at home, accompanied by a staggering military budget, and the *usual* drive for global political-economic-ideological dominance, itself receding as the world power system grows more complex and America's own economic preeminence weakens. Oh, that military option (the term itself fairly hissed these days) he is loath to relinquish. One thing, Obama is persistent. He will not be denied. We saw this in the way he wrecked health insurance, not only rejecting the single payer system, but, that much easier to do, rejecting the public option—meanwhile leaving private insurers riding high in the saddle. In fact, he has determinedly wrecked every single thing he's touched, or, through omission, left untouched. Banking regulation, job creation, climate change, on and on, all the while strengthening the military, making pals with the intelligence community, deploying naval power to the Mediterranean as a show of force, as much against Russia as Syria, and deploying naval power—as part of his “pivot”—to the Pacific, in what has become a building confrontation

with China. Today, Syria; tomorrow, the world. (The reader has to be my age to feel the significance of the thought.)

September 10<sup>th</sup>, then, is crunch-time for global politics. One wonders, given the text of his speech, why he didn't wait until the eleventh, so that in pulling out all the emotional-patriotic stops, he would have had more receptive ground—but perhaps that bit of hucksterism was beneath even him and his speech writers. When I recall FDR's "Fireside Chats," there is something warm, intimate, when he addressed the nation—for Obama, the opposite, a contrived performance by the committee of the whole, with a cloying appeal for trust and the "that's who we are as Americans" theme tolling the 9/11 memorial bells for implicit background. Crunch-time because, the following day Putin published an op. ed. article in the *New York Times* that succinctly, and I judge, accurately, called Obama's bluff (or better, world view) at every point. One freely grants that Putin is not Thomas Jefferson, but that does not invalidate his criticisms of Obama and US foreign policy. Those criticisms must stand on their own, and, as though by delayed reaction, they are being addressed, so to speak, in the week-plus since, by the usual suspects, dismissed out of hand by the defenders of American military virtue, notably, McCain, but even Gates and Panetta, all of whom are not satisfied with "surgical" strikes—nor is Obama, who is reported to have 20,000 soldiers off shore, and, not reportedly, but present and accounted for, an impressive flotilla of four missile-firing destroyers and the carrier Nimitz with its battle group. Diplomacy notwithstanding, or precisely because of the diplomacy-tack, they remain in the Mediterranean in a state of readiness, with a battleship nearby in the Red Sea.

This sort of "diplomacy," with presumably the same fate awaiting Iran, our national leaders understand, and see nothing inconsistent with that and an increasingly disapproving if not horrified world, and the violation of international law that such action if carried out portends—to them, as if to say, why all the shouting? America can do no wrong—Exceptionalism in full flower!

Thus, in returning to Putin's article, as an historian I'm not discomfited by not being up-to-the minute, and besides, September 11<sup>th</sup> is not that long ago (I'm being facetious), although our lives, and social criticism, seem to be dictated by the 24-hour news cycle. *Putin's piece is extremely important*, and is deserving of close textual analysis. He had the benefit of Obama's remarks the previous night, and with that in mind presents a refutation setting forth contrasting views of how their respective countries view the international order and the conduct necessary to avoiding conflict. Whatever his KGB experience, he patently sees through Obama and should be heard.

But first the address to which he is responding. Obama faces a self-imposed predicament of threatening war (crying wolf one too many times), then, finding himself increasingly isolated, hunkering down for the moment, yet still conceding nothing of substance, including the preparation to strike—the repeated phrase, now almost a cliché, keeping all options on the table. Whether to this point, before Putin's own refutation of US foreign policy, Obama is open to a diplomatic solution (he cannot help his transparent insincerity), remains doubtful. He and the Team, beginning with Axelrod, have proven themselves to be proficient spinmeisters whose themes resonate well with a jaded American public and a now-moribund Left unequal to the task, presently, of answering them or posing alternative pathways. We leave it to Putin to do that for us, here, in words, and regrettably, push comes to shove, in prospective deeds of deterrence—so close are we, by Obama's actions, to full-throttle Cold War geopolitical tensions.



Yes, only four days later, we find US-Russian agreement, Kerry and Lavrov, embracing in Geneva on the 14<sup>th</sup>, having laid out a timetable for Syrian chemical-weapons disarmament, as a means of avoiding or at least postponing the promised military attack. The agreement depends on Syria's compliance with what all but those in the US see as an unreasonable schedule, although conceivably doable. It seems a major breakthrough, even to the point of signaling the possibility of calling an international conference to resolve the wider Syrian crisis of civil war, but I suggest actually settles very little. The fact that Obama has kept in place America's considerable military presence in striking distance, reveals that he views diplomacy as the application of force and, in reality, is plainly miffed at Russia's intercession when his own grandiose scheme of putting America's capacity for inflicting lethal damage on world display has been stalled. How best humiliate Assad and make the compliance terms onerous, in order to sabotage the agreement, are no doubt hot topics among Obama's circle of advisers. From my textual analysis of his September 10<sup>th</sup> address to the nation, and Putin's reply in the *New York Times* the next day, I think one can see fundamental differences toward the structure of global politics between the US and Russia, and behind them the formal alliances and informal groupings supporting each (or for the latter, sharing a broader vision of international relations), differences, currently dramatized by Syria, but taking in the potential for Great-Powers' rivalry leading to chaos or worse.

There is no point in spelling out a horrific scenario of the collapse of the world system. I suspect that the Russians are more aware of the dangers than the Americans, who, in somewhat reckless pursuit of their national self-interest, as witness the interventions, embargoes, blockades, financial controls, etc., have shown through these activities a disregard bordering on contempt of the UN, international law, and the growing chorus of world opinion. Contrariwise, as evidenced by Putin's remarks, Russia has intervened in the Syrian situation not merely to save Assad's neck or the survival of a client-state, but because of a fear that Obama's militarization of American capitalism, in order to revive its maturity-in-decline gradual implosion, will have, unless checked, catastrophic consequences for all nations. The diagnosis of where America is presently at, is no mystery—to all but perhaps the US itself, judging by its domestic policies.

Most symptomatic of actual or impending decline, as its mature stage gives way to structural-political senescence, capitalism in America can be characterized by a fraying social safety net, the widening of class-differentials as affecting wealth and power, the rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, an inability to sustain economically sound levels of employment (hence bringing on stagnation via underconsumption), and the decline of manufacturing, all pointing to a systemic trend toward financialization at the expense of more rounded, sustained, economic development. Surely, Russia has its own disruptive structural and other effects of capitalism, likewise China, but neither is quite ready to come under the American umbrella (or US-controlled IMF and World Bank dictates), and both, far from being in decline, are still on an ascendant growth curve. Perhaps the world system of international capitalism, with China and Russia as active players, will witness fratricidal conflicts, in which case, the US would still be at a disadvantage in line with its decaying state, compared not only with these powers, but newly industrialized countries of vast potentiality such as Brazil.

What does this have to do with Obama, Putin, and Syria? Everything, and I suspect Putin, not Obama, has a full grasp of the emerging global framework, and that the basis for his analysis of US Middle East policy (for Iran is really the intended target in bombing Syria—as set forth in that

detestable phrase, “sending a signal”) runs as follows: Obama seeks US advantage, in light of its own declining fortunes *and* corresponding hegemonic ambitions to offset or forestall that decline, through a belligerent posture in world affairs as the key to maintaining its global position. “Credibility” is a crutch to justify unilateral actions and a sign to others that military solutions are favored as a test of national power and integrity. This means that a no-longer realization of hegemony, except through military means, augurs poorly for international stability. Putin, like Li, hardly the revolutionary, values this above all, and takes seriously the threat to stability from whatever quarter, including repercussions from US counterterrorism and, especially, stirring the cauldron of Islamic fundamentalism. Syria is not a negligible factor in the regional arrangements of power, from that standpoint, but also American establishment of a firmer sphere of influence in the Middle East, thence extending to Southern Europe, North Africa, and producing further pressures eastward on China.

Putin knows the US geostrategic game, crediting American desperation as a function of far-reaching changes in the international system which make US unilateral dominance impractical and adventurism like threats to Syria and Iran, the latter in conjunction with Israel, more and more likely. *That* calls for an implicit red line of his own, more pacific, I think, in intent, but consistent with Russia’s (and China’s) view of a multipolar framework of world power that offers greater stability through international law, which he argues, less opportunistically than one suspects, must be taken seriously. International law is not a state of heaven-on-earth, but as we read Putin’s text it becomes clear (the same holds for China) that its violation is for him the sign of weakened social systems acting aggressively to hold their own. In turn, for Putin, Chechnya, as a prime example, raises the twin and here related dangers of jihadism and social upheaval. Paradoxically, the US sees itself, or pretends to see itself, as endangered by Islam, a threat far away, while for Putin, Russia, though we discount his fear, regards it as an immediate challenge. (Again, this furnishes an important clue as to why Russia favors Assad, and wants Syria kept out of rebel hands.)

In this multipolar framework of world power, seen in the rise of China, Russia’s course of determined autonomy, and emerging Third World industrialization, Putin recognizes that the global system is no longer susceptible to US unilateral dominance, and is resolute—much to Obama’s chagrin—about not permitting its continuance. The UN now emerges for Russia as the linchpin for creating global order, not as a hypocritical gesture so that it could maintain its veto power in the Security Council, but as a defense against Great-Powers’ rivalries destructive to all concerned (i.e., including the world itself). The US, as in Obama’s long-publicized military attack in-the-making on Syria, signified, by definition, its contempt for the UN, that it would summarily bypass that body, while Russia, on which Putin capitalized quickly and I think rightly, became its champion in arraigning the US for the potential violation of international law. The Obama-Putin clash, as here described, overshadows the Kerry-Lavrov pact, so that one should have no illusions that all’s well in the world, or that, in the event a solution is found for Syria, there will not be further basic causes of international tension, as the American Project of Global Hegemony, subscribed to by both major political parties, continues in force (pardon the pun).

Obama’s address is a superb holding action. It enabled him the opportunity to undermine UN efforts while its investigators were at work (thereby prejudging results of the source of the chemical attacks, a subject still in dispute given that much of the initial analysis was put together by Israeli intelligence) and to allow attention on Congressional discontent over the projected bombing to peter

out. Neither the UN nor Congress, or for that matter, “friends and allies,” provided him the blind devotion (as did Blair, the puppy dog) that he demands in order to dodge accountability for his decisions. The arguments for targeted assassination—even many of the same national-security advisers pressing for it—have become so ingrained in the Washington mental set that patent lying about what is declared to be humanitarian intervention still governs and can be used for domestic, and until recently, international consumption. Beginning with, “My Fellow Americans,” we know what to expect: cramming patriotism down our throats while, oddly, some in America are not acknowledged by him as fellows—the poor, dissidents, whistleblowers in particular, the traitors of our time (for what else is the Espionage Act for?), and, from the way many of them have been treated, blacks, struggling to survive.

We’ve all seen the passages, “children lying in rows, killed by poison gas, others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath,” to which any person of moral conscience would take profound offense—no matter which side was responsible—and yet two things are troubling: a) the source of the chemical attack has still not been determined, and b) such descriptions can be multiplied twentyfold in the first-hand accounts of those investigating the results of US armed drone attacks for targeted assassination, except that now the objective description has to do with the *utter vaporizing of victims* or leaving them on the ground or in their homes as *blood spats*. How Obama relates to one and not the other, particularly when it is he who takes a personal hand in the selection of the drone victims, directs the operation, and hence, personally authorizes the murders (I guess Brecht would have said, that’s what commanders-in-chief do anyway), is a mystery locked only in the recesses of the psychopathic mind.

Obama’s evidence cannot even be dignified as circumstantial—e.g., government troops in the vicinity, message intercepts—presented as it was before the UN completed its work. The attack *was* chemical, clear from the outset. Now, without identifying the source, the UN analysis does appear to point to the Assad government. Yet even if true, one, without apologizing for him, must question the legitimacy of intervention, bombing another country where civilian casualties are bound to occur. Here Obama might as easily be looking in the mirror with respect to his CIA-JSOC operations, his Terror Tuesday gatherings to plan assassinations, his deprivations of civilian populations through punishing effects of embargoes, and his toleration of extreme poverty at home, when he states: “When dictators commit atrocities, they depend upon the world to look the other way until those horrifying pictures fade from memory.” Yes, we tend to forget the countless needless, immoral, illegal deaths done in the name of humanitarian intervention—obviously not all on Obama’s watch, as events in Chile, among others, testifies, but he has continued this trajectory of death-through-hegemonic striving, to the extent that he has proven himself no better than his predecessor, and more skillful in rationalizing war crimes as, somehow, defense of the Homeland. “If we fail to act”: Obama here sounds the note of urgency, as though, mine, London Bridge is falling down, but his, Iran is emboldened, Israel is in danger, and “the national security interests of the United States” is at stake. We are transported back to Vietnam and the domino theory. If we don’t stop the “gooks” in Vietnam, we’ll be fighting on the beaches of San Francisco, perhaps even Santa Monica.

POTUS is flexing his muscles: “That’s my judgment as commander-in-chief.” He seeks, more than earlier, to wear the mantle lightly, through close association with the military and intelligence communities. This is followed by hypocrisy carried, unashamedly, to the highest level, as the man

who flies solo whenever he can or needs to (what's a surge among friends?), then steps back to test the winds, before plunging forward, still solo: "But I'm also the president of the world's oldest constitutional democracy. So even though *I possessed the authority to order military strikes* [italics, mine], I believed it was right, in the absence of a direct or imminent threat to our society, to take this debate to Congress. I believe our democracy is stronger when the president acts with the support of Congress, and I believe that America acts more effectively abroad when we stand together." He possesses authority to order military strikes, even in the absence of a direct or imminent threat to our society??? Has the talk of increasing Executive Power been a chimera, a fabrication of mind of disaffected radicals, communists, again, whistleblowers cum traitors, or is Obama now asserting unconstitutional claims and—"we stand together—demanding conformity and silence in the face of usurpation?"

Famous last—or are these first—words: "I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria. I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan. I will not pursue a prolonged air campaign like Libya or Kosovo. This would be a targeted strike to achieve a clear objective: deterring the use of chemical weapons and degrading Assad's capabilities." The Pinocchio syndrome, a teeny-weeny police action, to be sure. But, he continues, to those who say I don't go far enough, "Let me make something clear: The United State military doesn't do pinpricks." No, indeed, shock and awe is more like it, as in the "prolonged air campaign" he graciously noted, only to put aside. Obama is all about "send[ing] a message," in this case, "to Assad that no other nation can deliver." Why no other nation? Implicitly he here invokes the theme of Exceptionalism, explicitly, he does so as he goes on. As for retaliation, these "are threats we face every day," and, as for "our ally Israel," it "can defend itself with overwhelming force" and the "unshakable support" of America. Therefore, all signals go, preferably at the *right* time, for there is nothing to fear (even the Pentagon knows better, with gentle warnings, for it is dangerous to cross POTUS, of unintended consequences).

He continues: But you say, "some of Assad's opponents are extremists." And his ready answer is, if the US does not act, al Qaeda [my spelling] will only grow stronger. In fact, right after the attack, the US will build the institutions of peace (why not skip the attack and seek mediation, he of course does not say): "But al-Qaida will only draw strength in a more chaotic Syria if people there see the world doing nothing to prevent innocent civilians from being gassed to death. The majority of the Syrian people and the Syrian opposition *we work with* [my italics] just want to live in peace, with dignity and freedom. And the day after any military action, we would redouble our efforts to achieve a political solution that strengthens those who reject the forces of tyranny and extremism." If Obama's concern, however, is a "more chaotic Syria," as the breeding ground for al-Qaeda, the US military attack there, as already seen in the areas subject to drone strikes, will only turn the population against America, and breed the group faster than rabbits. The missiles of Exceptionalism are poor underwriters of a "political solution," and the effort to differentiate the good from the bad in "the Syrian opposition" grows more difficult by the day with the revelations of the atrocities committed by the rebels and the right-wing credentials of their lobbyist in Washington (who has just been dropped from the Institute for the Study of War because she lied about having a Georgetown Ph.D.).

Here the address hits its epigonic high point, and I, a stone wall of disbelief, as Obama does and at the same time denies that he does put on his commander-and-chief hat and implied regalia of

leadership. To the question he poses, “Finally, many of you have asked, why not leave this to other countries or seek solutions short of force?,” there is no reply, just a change of subject, the old debating trick of anticipating an embarrassing point as though having disposed of it. Instead, more fictive letters immediately follows in the discussion: “And several people wrote to me, we should not be the world’s policeman. I agree. And I have a deeply held preference for peaceful solutions.” To paraphrase Barnum, You can fool the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, but not all of the people, all of the time. This time, despite the destroyers and the Nimitz battle group put in position, the aid to the rebels (whether or not it has arrived), above all perhaps, the propaganda barrage over the months to lay the basis for a military attack, Obama’s claim of “a deeply held preference for peaceful solutions” seems at best fatuous, especially in light of the US global presence of military bases, armed drones, and CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, not to say a military budget equal to that of the world’s combined: “Over the last two years my administration has tried diplomacy and sanctions, warnings and negotiations. But chemical weapons were still used by the Assad regime.” A prejudgment, we still don’t know, but the eagerness to follow through, whatever the result, we do know.

Obama acknowledges Russia’s proposal to bring Assad’s chemical-weapons stockpile under international control with a view to its destruction—but before hosannas are sounded, we must recall what followed in the address: “Meanwhile, *I’ve ordered our military to maintain their current posture* [my italics], to keep the pressure on Assad and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails. And tonight I give thanks again to our military and their families for their incredible strength and sacrifices.” Pressure on Assad here signifies diplomacy at gun point—not a promising ground for diplomacy to succeed. Also, Obama’s noble-warrior theme hardly conduces to thoughts of peace. Which leads in brilliantly to the glorification of hegemony itself—this with an entirely straight face: “My fellow Americans, for nearly seven decades the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements. It has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world’s a better place because we have borne them.” To properly respond to this passage (probably the handiwork of Ben Rhodes, chief escalator of peace rhetoric in Team Obama) would require a volume, beginning with a crash reading program of William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, and Walter LeFeber, but we see at once (“anchor of global security”) the one-sided view of the Cold War, with the Korean War snugly fit into the early years, while the forging and enforcement of international agreements, such as the IMF and World Bank, nicely tilts monetary and trade advantages toward the US, and “burdens of leadership” brings tears to the eyes of America’s selflessness in pursuit of world peace.

Enough is enough. America the Exceptional—from every hillside, let freedom ring: “Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That’s what makes America different. *That’s what makes us exceptional.*” [my italics] We alone are solicitous of the health and welfare of children—as the tally of dead children from our drone strikes abroad, and failure to achieve gun control at home, as well as the effect of disease and malnutrition on children in the families of the poor in America, conversely testify. What perhaps makes America different is endemic intervention, coupled with unrestrained capitalist development, and a Garrison-State (or rather, National-Security State) mentality, now joined with the apparatus of massive surveillance—all currently under the aegis of liberalism. Yet why bother to distinguish, because liberalism itself

cannot be distinguished from conservatism, itself dropping its philosophic pretenses of concern over the individual, privacy, and civil liberties, both persuasions acting in unison about armed strength, preeminence, and war?

Obama then bids us good-night: “With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth [Exceptionalism]. Thank you. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.”

Poor Putin, coming after Obama, a hard act to follow, puts his temerity in writing a *Times* op. ed. article in the category of a churlish opponent wiping the chess pieces off the board, except that, rather than churlish, he is quite matter-of-fact, sensible, and in his criticisms of America’s position, on the mark—and except, as well, this is hardly a game, for as Putin is aware (and Obama appears blithely to ignore or disregard), US military action in Syria could have worldwide, and emphatically, regional, repercussions of a horrifying nature. Titled “A Plea for Caution From Russia,” Putin begins by emphasizing the role of the UN in stabilizing the world system and preserving the standard of international law as applicable to the conduct of nations. Implicitly, unilateralism weakens if not destroys the UN’s authority and integrity, and preeminence likewise. He is all business: “Recent events surrounding Syria have prompted me to speak directly to the American people and their political leaders. It is important to do so at a time of insufficient communication between our societies.”

This is not Cold-War rhetoric; he points to a more overarching record of common pursuit (something everyone needs to be reminded of): “Relations between us have passed through different stages. We stood against each other during the cold war. But we were also allies once, and defeated the Nazis together. The universal international organization—the United Nations—was then established to prevent such devastation from ever happening again.” His grasp of the significance of honoring the UN does not seem opportunistic, for he sees no alternative for the maintenance of international order, and reminds Americans that the Security Council veto was done at US insistence (although he uses the more polite term, “consent”): “The United Nations’ founders understood that decisions affecting war and peace should happen only by consensus, and with America’s consent the veto by Security Council permanent members was enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The profound wisdom of this has underpinned the stability of international relations for decades.” The warning is sounded (appropriately in light of Obama’s actions and the frequently voiced disparagements of the UN in Congress and public opinion—or when the topic of Israel is broached in this country): “No one wants the United Nations to suffer the fate of the League of Nations, which collapsed because it lacked real leverage. This is possible *if influential countries bypass the United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorization.*” [my italics] Obama’s run-up to war is precisely that, a deliberate undermining of the UN. That Putin has to remind Americans of the importance of the UN is somewhat embarrassing, how far we’ve come in conducting interventions, embargoes, and covert operations directed to regime change, all with impunity, none of which he has the grace to mention.

Instead, he comes right to the point, the *present*, in what to me represents a masterful summary (again I speak without apology in agreeing with one we are in the habit of demonizing): “The potential strike by the United States against Syria, despite strong opposition from many countries and major political and religious leaders, including the pope, will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria’s borders. A strike would

increase violence and unleash a new wave of terrorism. It could undermine multilateral efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and further destabilize the Middle East and North Africa. It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance.” The words come like hammer-blows, each of the points deserving to be put in italics, and yet daily commentary in America is that of Russian obstructionism, the untenability of the UN, Russia, and China ganging up on America in the Security Council, coded—I submit—for placing checks on whatever seeks to arrest the US’s acting with impunity.

Putin’s own analysis is realistic—US intervention in a *civil war* in which, by its reckoning, the opposition has admittedly extremist elements, yet it still shows partiality to them (once more he politely avoids identifying America by name as a source of weapons’ support)—an analysis which sees the cry of democracy to be mere cant in justifying intervention: “Syria is not witnessing a battle for democracy, but an armed conflict between government and opposition in a multireligious country. There are few champions of democracy in Syria. But there are more than enough Qaeda fighters and extremists of all stripes battling the government. The United States Department of State has designated Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, fighting with the opposition, as terrorist organizations. The internal conflict, fueled by foreign weapons supplied to the opposition, is one of the bloodiest in the world.”

Putin does not embellish the image of Assad (“there are few champions of democracy in Syria”), but rather, in the passage, appears motivated—as may be the case of his confronting the Chechen problem which he sees as extremism—by concerns that “there are more than enough Qaeda fighters and extremists of all stripes” in the opposition, in which case, paradoxically, *he is fighting America’s problem for it*. Except for one thing. America, although invariably inconsistent in warring against its “enemies,” as in the way it assisted the Taliban in Afghanistan against the then Soviets, and even today, refuses to come clean on the degree of extremist infiltration if not leadership of the Syrian rebels, and further, is able to downplay what Putin mentions, the “multireligious” conflict and related sectarian violence, is not simply intelligence-challenged (although 9/11 proved that it is), but that it willfully looks the other way because its attack on Assad goes well beyond either the now-presumed sterling character of the opposition or the use of chemical weapons, whichever side is responsible. Assad must go, because the US wants *in*—a semipermanent base of operations, or even permanent, by which to complete its control of a decisive area of geostrategic importance. Putin mentions the Middle East and North Africa (already replete with drone bases), but, and beyond wanting to stop the spread of extremism, his support of Assad has largely to do with America’s potential for direct encroachment, or call it military readiness, on Russia and China, what I termed elsewhere, from that base an enlarging arc of influence, beginning with Southern Europe, and extending as far as the hegemonic vision of the US can carry.

On extremism (“the internal conflict...is one of the bloodiest in the world”), he says as much, concerning Russian fears: “Mercenaries from Arab countries fighting there, and hundreds of militants from Western countries *and even Russia* [my italics], are an issue of deep concern. Might they not return to our countries with experience acquired in Syria? After all, after fighting in Libya, extremists moved on to Mali. This threatens us all.” When one looks closely at Obama’s invoking national-security interests (killing those babies in Syria may lead next to the killing of ours), Putin has more reason for concern over the consequences for Russia of the Syrian civil war, as his

foregoing question captures so well, than does the US. He is emphatic in setting forth an order of priorities: “From the outset, Russia has advocated peaceful dialogue enabling Syrians to develop a compromise plan for their own future. We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law.” And he goes on to explain: “We need to use the United Nations Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today’s complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos.”

I wish his following words could be carved on the White House portico, or at least hung in the room off the Situation Room, where the Terror Tuesday confabs are held (or better, the Situation Room itself): “*The law is still the law, and we must follow it whether we like it or not. Under current international law, force is permitted only in self-defense or by the decision of the Security Council. Anything else is unacceptable under the United Nations Charter and would constitute an act of aggression.*” [my italics] Savor the words, “act of aggression”—forbidden throughout the length and breadth of the land, for a military attack on Syria is neither in self-defense nor approved by the Security Council. No wonder Obama finds it easier to deal with Cameron and Hollande. They tell him what he wants to hear. Not Putin: “No one doubts that poison gas was used in Syria. But there is every reason to believe it was used not by the Syrian Army, but by opposition forces, to provoke intervention by their powerful foreign patrons, who would be siding with the fundamentalists.” Then, notwithstanding Israel’s harsh criticism of the Russian UN proposal, and anxious for the attack on Syria to come off (primarily as a precedent for a similar attack on Iran), Putin states what should put Netanyahu in a dudgeon, although too hardened for that: “Reports that militants are preparing an attack—this time against Israel—cannot be ignored.” [Addendum to the preceding: Rouhani and Hollande have agreed to meet next week at the UN; Obama still is obsessed with setting preconditions for direct talks, and even then not necessarily at the top level, while Netanyahu throws cold water on anything to do with peace, Syria or Iran.]

In other words, it is Putin, not Obama, who is mindful of the destructive consequences of intervention, and he then states what most needs to be said (I think, for America’s own sake, which is very far from Obama’s position and that of the USG and public opinion): “It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States. Is it in America’s long-term interest? I doubt it. Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling together coalitions under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’” He is on a roll, truth coming like lightning bolts: “But force has proved ineffective and pointless. Afghanistan is reeling, and no one can say what will happen after international forces withdraw. Libya is divided into tribes and clans. In Iraq the civil war continues, with dozens killed each day. In the United States, many draw an analogy between Iraq and Syria, and ask why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes.” And he adds the frosting on the cake, bitter-tasting to Obama, his national-security advisers, most members of Congress, and a large part of the American public: “No matter how targeted the strikes or how sophisticated the weapons, civilian casualties are inevitable, including the elderly and children, *whom the strikes are meant to protect.*” [my italics]

In America, surgical strikes and other Pentagon jargon are a disguise for Nazi-like war plans—my, not his, observation, but Putin captures the drift of such reasoning: “The world reacts by asking: if you cannot count on international law, then you must find other ways to ensure your security. Thus a growing number of countries seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction. This is



logical: if you have a bomb, no one will touch you. We are left with talk of the need to strengthen nonproliferation, when in reality this is being eroded.” This is among his most important points. Instead of intervention, global visions of hegemony, surveillance at home to cover violations of international law, how about nonproliferation, and realizing as well the moral vacuum created by contempt for that law, a vacuum filled by weapons of mass destruction? He then says plaintively, “We must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement.” Hence he urges the need to pursue the path to peace through the Security Council and, optimistically, sees the hope of Obama’s cooperation in “steer[ing] the discussion back toward negotiations.”

What a difference in political-ideological atmosphere, this hope of Putin’s of transcending the Cold War, which I find very much with us, enlivened at every turn by America’s love affair with militarism. Putin is cautious: “If we can avoid force against Syria, this will improve the atmosphere in international affairs and strengthen mutual trust. It will be our shared success and open the door to cooperation on other issues.” Now, rather than the schoolboy slouching in the back row of the schoolroom, as Obama stupidly characterized him, Putin emerges as the *teacher* (in what might be thought a reversal of roles), the one imparting wisdom to an America hiding behind the cloak of Exceptionalism as it forcibly seeks to maintain a unilateral position of political-economic-ideological-military-cultural global dominance. He is speaking with knowledge of Obama’s address—a true joining of issues, which allows one to ascertain the differences in world outlook of the two leaders.

Despite initial courtesies, Putin does not hold back: “My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States’ policy is ‘what makes America different. It’s what makes us exceptional.’ *It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation.* [my italics] There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask the Lord’s blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal.” Would that Obama understood this lesson, relevant to domestic and international politics alike.

My *New York Times* Comment (Sept. 11) on Michael D. Shears’ article on Obama’s address, “Planned as Call to Act, Obama’s Speech Became a Plea for Time,” follows:

The delaying tactic is not that of the Syrian government, but that of Obama, who, temporarily stymied, is biding his time, hoping that nothing comes of the Russian proposal, so that he can once again revert to form: i.e., bomb Syria. This president’s vision is so suffused in militarism as to make any of his moves, particularly the turn to Congress, calculated. If the UK had not bowed out, we would be up to our neck in war. His national-security advisers, to a person, are committed to so-called humanitarian intervention, as a cover for assuring continued American global preeminence.

If Syria’s chemical weapons are to be placed under international control, what of the US stockpile. Those we deem as enemies are compelled to submit (whether chemical or nuclear weapons), those who are “friends and allies,” including ourselves, no—a double standard laughable, were it not so serious. Iran, on the nuclear issue, No; Israel, of course, Yes.

Also, with the criticism of Syria's chemical attack (still unproven to have been the Assad government), POTUS with a straight face fails to allude to his own program of armed drones for targeted assassination. We kill children on a regular basis through collateral damage, signature strikes, and whenever civilian targets are involved. If we had bombed Syria, this would surely happen. The decision to do so, still on the table, is cold-blooded, sadistic, morally nihilistic, all aptly describing our president.

My *New York Times* Comment (Sept. 12) on Vladimir V. Putin's op. ed. article, "A Plea for Caution From Russia," follows:

USG and the American public are unlikely to give Mr. Putin's statement serious consideration. That's deeply regrettable. "We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law." One may be skeptical, but Russia's position here is unassailable. The US by originally announcing unilateral plans for a military attack has denied even the legitimacy of the UN. We have become in the eyes of the world an outlaw nation. Putin raises serious objections to unilateral action, not least, the obvious point of destabilizing the Middle East, as itself raising the clear possibility of a wider conflagration. This is nowhere evident in Obama's thinking, as the remark on "exceptionalism" indicates.

Putin was too kind to point out that Obama on a regular basis personally authorizes targeted assassination, and in the conduct of interventions should by rights be summoned before the International Criminal Court. America's holier than thou attitude toward international politics is slowly but surely becoming resisted—the UK a straw in the wind; even NATO is not on board. My guess is that Obama will go ahead and take military action, with or without Congressional approval. His self-conceit of speaking for the world, as when he said that not he, but the world, has drawn the red line is maniacal and somewhat frightening, a weak ego clutching for the need to demonstrate strength, as meanwhile—Putin is certainly correct on that—civilian deaths will mount from such an attack. If the Kerry-Lavrov agreement does hold, America still wins in manifesting its hegemonic prowess; neither its own nor Israel's stockpile of chemical weapons is subject to arms control. And Obama will be back for another day; relinquishing the use of force is a hard *habit* to break.

## **SEPTEMBER 27, 2013**

### **Obama and Rouhani at the UN**

Obama in his address to the United Nations, Sept. 24, treated the world to a display of "democratic" rhetorical flights which uncovered at the deepest levels America's commitment to continued world hegemony and, related, the arrogance inhering in the ideology of exceptionalism. Intervention has become a God-ordained historical mission, for if it were not for the US, vacuums would open wide, especially in the Middle East, from which chaos and extremism would emerge and boil over. America is selfless in all things, striving only for global peace and harmony. Chalk up another free pass for Obama in a speech riddled with self-righteousness (his own and the nation's) and glaring omissions of American practice, whether on intervention per se (in violation of the UN Charter), the use of chemical warfare (Agent Orange and napalm alone can be counted in the metric tons), deprivation of civil liberties, or paramilitary operations, directed to regime change.

What makes his UN appearance both significant and interesting is that Rouhani, the newly-elected president of Iran, was wise to his smoke and mirrors, and outright dishonesty, calling Obama's bluff, e.g., on the human consequences of the embargo on Iran in which it is the people—a clear concept of legitimated violence—who suffer the most.

Since the press, as earlier with respect to Putin's op. ed. in *The Times*, reported little of substance of Rouhani's speech, also the 25<sup>th</sup>, several hours later than Obama's, let me begin there first, because I believe it sets a standard—as did Putin, in his defense of international law—by which to analyze and judge that of Obama's position hailed as a new approach to America's role in the world. At times, it is difficult to distinguish the White House propaganda mill—the legacy of Axelrod—from that of the media for which it generates material.

Rouhani begins by differentiating the politics of fear and that of hope. Implicitly, although he does not say this, I sense here a wider meaning to which this differentiation can be assigned: the US, in the fear corner, much the remainder of the world, the hope corner, or more specifically, America as a declining power, while the hitherto regarded Third World an *ascending* force in world history. In sum, American unilateralism, and its refusal to base its conduct, restrain its military, or moderate its ideology, on behalf of mutual trust and common interests (both of which Rouhani singles out for praise as necessary goals for world peace), is leading to its isolation in the global community and hastening its decline as a global superpower.

Rouhani's introductory remarks deserve quotation in full, with the above-differentiation perhaps in mind:

Our world today is replete with fear and hope; fear of war and hostile regional and global relations; fear of deadly confrontation of religious, ethnic and national identities; fear of institutionalization of violence and extremism; fear of poverty and destructive discrimination; fear of decay and destruction of life-sustaining resources; fear of disregard for human dignity and rights; and fear of neglect of morality. Alongside these fears, however, there are new hopes; the hope of universal acceptance by the people and the elites all across the globe of “yes” to peace and no to “war”; and the hope of preference of dialogue over conflict, and moderation over extremism.

I cannot pretend to be a sitting judge on the words of the speaker, their intent and veracity, except that with long experience on *listening* to and weighing the value of each word, I tend to form opinions as to their authenticity and the integrity of the speaker. I guess the phrase “institutionalization of violence and extremism” jumped out at me to anchor the passage, because marked by thoughtful observation. When we compare this with *all* of Obama's speech, his own words are hollow and define the kind of formulaic appeals best suited to campaigns or the rationalization of policies pointing to the opposite.

Also to be noted in the passage, Rouhani has a conception of religion—the sensitive point, presumably to be avoided, in these discussions—in which he sees its importance as the conveyer of moral law, not as the source of “deadly confrontation,” but ideally, as compatible with, and wholly integrated into, a democratic society. Thus, he continues: “The realization of democracy consistent with religion and the peaceful transfer of executive power manifested that Iran is the anchor of stability in an otherwise ocean of regional instabilities.” This of course, as he later points out, is meant as the antithesis of, and answer to, Muslim-bashing, itself, he implies now and subsequently argues, being responsible for war and pervasive fear in the contemporary world. Hence: “The firm belief of our people and government in enduring peace, stability, tranquility, peaceful resolution of disputes and reliance on the ballot box as the basis of power, public acceptance and legitimacy, has indeed played a key role in creating such a safe environment.” (The phrase “public acceptance,” to me, takes the statement outside a context of political cant—but that is just a personal impression.)

Then comes pure gold. In my last *CP* article, before the events of the 24<sup>th</sup>, I used the phrase, “crunch-time of global politics,” sensing the significance of the national-political-military factors surrounding the events in Syria (and perhaps their repercussions for Iran, notably, if Obama had attacked Syria—still not ruled out—or Israel, Iran), a conclusion Rouhani also reached, and now states, at the UN. The passage’s sobering reality, in contrast to Obama’s and Netanyahu’s blithe assertion of power, distinguishes the heavyweights from the lightweights, intellectually and morally, and perhaps distinguishes ascendant and declining world currents and the supporters of each perspective:

The current critical period of transition in international relations is replete with dangers, albeit with unique opportunities. Any miscalculation of one’s position, and of course, of others, will bear historic damages; a mistake by one actor will have negative impact on all others. *Vulnerability is now a global and indivisible phenomenon.*” (Italics, mine)

Neocons will chuckle; humanitarian interventionists (of which the White House has an abundance) will stew; Obama, utterly oblivious to whatever stands in the way of American global hegemony, will look in the mirror, confident he can outsmart history, rationality, and moral decency, will march on—all while the clock continues to tick, alarm bells going off with the next intervention or so-called “surgical” strike. Rouhani sees clearly what most of us, those not blinded by the Exceptionalism-theme in the first place, still miss because our emphasis on continuities of American foreign policy inure us to the qualitative jumps in that continuity quite possibly before us: That this is a “period of transition in international relations”. Our blindness is due in no small measure to Obama’s own distinctive contribution to foreign policy, the liberalization of aggression, wherein even personally authorized targeted assassination passes muster as “humane interventionism.”

The disclosures of Manning and Snowden, revelations showing to the world America’s geostrategic ambitions and assumptions, and its underhanded relations with its “friends and allies,” from Germany to Brazil at the highest levels, and showing to Americans the extent to which domestic surveillance is now a key element in the encroachment upon civil liberties, partly to further those ambitions, partly to ensure accommodation to the militarization of capitalism as necessary to avoiding its stagnation and decline, are something of a wake-up call as to the seriousness of the state of international politics. So, Rouhani is ahead of the curve in this important regard. And he goes further—the media complimenting him on his tone (although snidely dismissive in general) because he doesn’t attack the US, when in fact his very next statement leaves no doubt about whom he has in mind: “At this sensitive juncture in the history of global relations, the age of zero-sum games is over, even though a few actors still tend to rely *on archaic and deeply ineffective ways and means to preserve their superiority and domination*. Militarism and the recourse to violent and military means to subjugate others are failed examples of the perpetuation of old ways in new circumstances.” (Italics, mine)

The new circumstances are a gradually decentralizing world power system; US unilateralism is no longer acceptable or even workable in light of rival centers of industrial-commercial-financial development at precisely the moment of American global overextension of its military posture and forces whilst sucking out its economic resources for domestic rebuilding. Leviathan’s innards are drying up, requiring, which Rouhani notes, as integral to maintaining hegemonic claims, ever greater reliance on force and violence:

Coercive economic and military policies and practices geared to the maintenance and preservation of old superiorities and dominations have been pursued in a conceptual mindset that negates peace, security, human dignity, and exalted human ideals. Ignoring differences between human societies *and globalizing Western values as universal* ones represent another manifestation of this conceptual mindset. Yet another cognitive model is *the persistence of Cold War mentality and bi-polar division of the world* into “superior us” and “inferior others.” Fanning fear and phobia around the emergence of new actors on the world scene is another. (Italics, mine—actually the entire passage deserves italics)

This is masterful social-science analysis. By that I don’t mean employment of “conceptual mindset,” but insights which seemingly typify the character of modern industrialism, as Weber, Parsons, Merton would have it, yet possessing added specificity perhaps uniquely applying to America. Hegemonic posture and/or aspirations eats away at democracy itself, resulting not only in “coercive economic and military policies and practices” simply to stay on top (or get a shot at that dubious honor), but also the comprehensive NEGATION of what democracy is or should be all about, including—the authenticity of his expression once again—“exalted human ideals.” He doesn’t stop there. Within a searing criticism of ethnocentrism (the bipolar division of the world into us and them), he brilliantly makes three related points, related because they reveal the psychodynamics going into ethnocentrism—and yielding what the Adorno study revealed a half-century ago, its core of authoritarianism.

First, the universalization of Western values, itself really the whole ball game with respect to America’s relations to much of the rest of the world (and even to be imposed on somewhat recalcitrant “friends and allies”) as the American Way, e.g., the equation of democracy with capitalism, the supremacy of property and the property right as the basis of legitimate social organization, and the acceptance—here Rouhani nails a point he develops later—of the two-tiered world, an amalgam, economically, of the trickle-down framework (based on extraction of wealth from the bottom) and market fundamentalism.

Second, the Cold War mentality, which goes beyond a bipolar global division (although it is also that) to signify the precise regurgitation of such tensions, now, China primarily in the cross-hairs, with Russia a secondary concern or target, and, arguably, counterterrorism the surrogate for anticommunism, i.e., the same mental patterns, also beyond mere ethnocentrism, to include demonization of the “enemy” and a geostrategic acceptance of the falling-domino theory. Rouhani does not say the foregoing, except for the generalized Cold War mentality, yet the traits he describes fits perfectly.

Third, separately stated, but interdependent, “ignoring differences between human societies” and “fanning fear and phobia around the emergence of new actors on the world scene” apply equally to the US confrontation with Islam as a whole (somehow, given American parochialism, “new actors”) and the treatment of Third World nations, to be blessed with our guidance and put down should the natives resist. This third feature of the conceptual mindset feeds nicely into humanitarian interventionism as a cloak for unmitigated exploitation, the exploiter preordained as both superior and ostensibly moral.

Rouhani’s presentation is airtight, for he sees in “such an environment” the *increase* of every sort of conflict, “governmental and non-governmental, religious, ethnic, and even racial violence,”

all capable of embroiling the Great Powers, to which he adds: “The catastrophic impact of violent and extremist narratives should not—in fact, must not—be underestimated.” Then he comes to the immediate point, that of nonintervention, implicitly, a global proposition, but intended specifically for the Middle East: “In this context, the strategic violence, which is manifested in the efforts to deprive regional players from their natural domain of action, containment policies, regime change from outside, and the efforts towards redrawing of political borders and frontiers, is extremely dangerous and provocative.” He is describing the US record (without naming it) to a tee, referring to Israel as well.

There is much more, but I should like to bear down on his very next statement, where ethnocentrism is fleshed out in geopolitical terms which affect Iran equally with other nations similarly situated, as being defined either in the US sphere of influence or, by rights, subject to American guidance (both cases giving license for regime change and/or eliminating suspected terrorists). Here ethnocentrism breaks down into its harsher side, xenophobia, and also what Washington takes as its self-image, *realpolitik*, in this case, ideological rigidity—on behalf of capitalism—under a different name.

“The prevalent international political discourse,” he states, “depicts a civilized center surrounded by un-civilized peripheries.” (His auditors, I suspect, and much of the non-Western world outside, knew which nations went where.) Neither Marx nor Paul Baran could have said it better: “In this picture, the relation between the center of world power and the peripheries is hegemonic.” I’m sorry, but when I think of Obama’s stupefaction when it comes to the moral delineation of public policy, instead in a dither about such concerns as credibility and sending a message or simply occupied with hit lists and assassination, I weep for joy at one who penetrates the veils of doubletalk to illumine, as now, basic relations of power:

The discourse assigning the North the center stage and relegating the South to the periphery has led to the establishment of a *monologue* at the level of international relations. The creation of illusory identity distinctions and the current prevalent violent forms of xenophobia are the inevitable outcome of such a discourse. Propagandistic and unfounded faith-phobic, Islamo-phobic, Shia-phobic, and Iran-phobic discourses do indeed represent serious threats against world peace and human dignity.

The shoe is now on the other foot—those supposedly aggressed upon are the aggressors, xenophobic as both conviction and convenience (it’s hard to tell which is worse). The word *monologue* jumps out of the passage indicating the one-sided power relation, which confers the ability to defame, denounce, ultimately kill, the now ubiquitous Other—and at the same time exercise social control at home. Yet a final two sentences bring the thought squarely home: “The propagandistic discourse has assumed dangerous proportions through portrayal and inculcation of presumed imaginary threats. One such imaginary threat is the so-called ‘Iranian threat’—which has been employed as an excuse to justify a long catalogue of crimes and catastrophic practices over the past three decades.” The litany of these “imaginary threats,” and the violence in putting them down, takes up much of the remainder of the speech, as when he refers to “structural violence,” such as the sanctions regime, as being “intrinsically inhumane and against peace.”

We turn now to Obama, his speech before the General Assembly earlier on the 24<sup>th</sup>, purportedly a new approach to America’s role in the world, yet couched in such manner as to yield little of

substance and, on careful reading, still willing to bypass the UN with unilateral military action on its, and his, discretion. We are all familiar by now with the speech's presumed high points, as found in Mark Landler's *NYT* article of the 25<sup>th</sup>, "Obama Says He Will Pursue Diplomacy on Iran and Syria." Not quite, but nice try. Several examples, before we look more closely: "The roadblocks may prove to be too great, but I firmly believe the diplomatic path must be tested." Or this: "Without a credible military threat, the Security Council had demonstrated no inclination to act at all. If we cannot agree even on this, then it will show that the U.N. is incapable of enforcing the most basic of international laws. On the other hand, if we succeed, it will send a powerful message that the use of chemical weapons has no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that this body means what it says." If even the ambiguities expressed here, a nod to roadblocks, finger-pointing at the UN on its inability to act, yet—the obsession with credibility, the need to send a message—a possible breakthrough on chemical weapons (never once apologizing for America's heavy use of the same), were a correct statement of the US position, there would be at least some prospect of change. But another quote, referring to the Middle East, puts a damper on reduction of military force as a foreign policy tenet: "The United States of America is prepared *to use all elements of our power*, including military force, to secure these core interests [Iranian nuclear policy, Syrian civil war, security of Israel, the last here being really first] in the region. We will confront external aggression against our allies and partners, as we did in the Gulf War."

Thus far, we see a mixed bag, at best, grudging acceptance of diplomacy, but also the unquestioned right of involvement in the region, and, should things go not to America's liking, the avowal of unilateral action which, given the setting of the speech, is a direct slap in the face of the Charter and international law. Here then is a brief examination of text, a lot easier task than with Rouhani because Obama is all surface, with little or no depth. Placate the audience—and the institution: "For most of recorded history, individual aspirations were subject to the whims of tyrants and empires.... The idea that nations and peoples could come together in peace to solve their disputes and advance a common prosperity seemed unimaginable." Two world wars and nuclear weapons meant that "humanity could not survive the course it was on." Ergo, the UN, "to resolve conflicts, enforce rules of behavior, and build habits of cooperation that would grow stronger over time."

Then a shadow of doubt appears. Every generation faces "new and profound challenges, and this body continues to be tested." He queries whether the international community could "squarely meet those challenges," that is, "whether the United Nations can meet the tests of our time." Obama proceeds to take credit for surmounting the financial debacle, but sees the progress as "fragile and unequal," with more work ahead; likewise, credit for ending a decade of war. This presumed foundation of success enables him to announce the Grand Departure, each and every detail of which is open to challenge:

For the United States, these new circumstances have meant shifting away from a perpetual war-footing. Beyond bringing our troops home, we have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing, imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible, and there is a near certainty of *no civilian* casualties. We are transferring detainees to other countries and trying terrorists in *courts of law*, while working *diligently* to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. And just as we reviewed how we deploy our extraordinary military capabilities in a way *that lives up to our ideals*, we have begun to review the way that we gather intelligence, so as to

*properly balance* the legitimate security concerns of our citizens and allies, with the privacy concerns that all people share. (Italics, mine)

If this were a *mea culpa*, I, and I'm sure much of the world, would be pleased, signaling a halt to targeted assassination, an end to monstrous defense appropriations and the distortions they produce in the everyday lives of countless millions, a closing of the prison that shamelessly denies habeas corpus rights to detainees (and has led, in their desperation, to hunger strikes), and not least, an ineradicable mark of authoritarianism in the program of massive surveillance. Proper balance means, not being caught, on this and on all else, wherein the spirit of government is to erect transparency into a principle of pure evil. What truly hurts, though, is the glib phrase, "in a way that lives up to our ideals," similar to another pet phrase of his, after citing atrocities committed by others, "that's not who we are," the first of these coupled with "our extraordinary military capabilities," and together, either "our ideals" sanction the foregoing practices, the vein of militarism running throughout (even as justification for surveillance), or, in fact, *who we are*, as a people, legitimates antidemocratic practice, in every case, drones included, as the key to national identity. Methinks he protesteth too much, selecting for commendation what the record demonstrates to be within the discomfort zone of war crimes—even when he claims there to be improvement in each. Nor, the rub, is the improvement shown to have been forthcoming. Surveillance is surveillance, from which much else flows in evaluating the policies, record, and veracity of POTUS.

Parenthetically, Obama's speech got off to an inauspicious start—which he, unlike most present, may not have noticed. For Dilma Rousseff, the president of Brazil, came immediately before, and whether or not they shook hands I do not know—or care, because the symbolism here is that Rousseff, herself once imprisoned under the Colonels, canceled an official State visit to the US, something probably rarely occurring in the case of a head of state who does this, and certainly *not* when America is the host. Her reason for the cancellation, of course, was the NSA surveillance of her own personal communications—with no apology forthcoming. So much for "privacy concerns that all people share," to recur to Obama's statement, the violation of privacy matched by the violation—for surely eavesdropping on the Brazilian government was also involved—of international law.

There follows a recitation of problems in the world, from the terrorist attack on a shopping mall in Kenya to the Syrian civil war, the latter in which the "international community recognized the stakes early on, but our response has not matched the scale of the challenge." He continues, not mentioning, however, America's military assistance to the rebels—and here as elsewhere speaking of "the moderate opposition" as a way of rationalizing the assistance, while placing extremist elements in the coalition in a sort of limbo as though present but extraneous: "A peace process is still-born. America and others have worked to bolster the moderate opposition, but extremist groups have still taken root to exploit the crisis. Assad's traditional allies have propped him up, citing principles of sovereignty to shield his regime." Although he does not say, this is becoming a war, in part, of proxy armies representing larger interests. What he does say is that Assad used chemical weapons "in an attack that killed more than 1,000 people, including many children," therefore setting the stage for US intervention, especially when and where the UN and other nations feared to tread.



Obama's technique is to raise questions, but, the insinuation planted by them, he then turns elsewhere instead of answering them. He usually returns to the children, but never the children his own policies, such as signature strikes, are responsible for killing. The final question: "What is the role of the United Nations, and international law, in meeting cries for justice?" This takes gall for one who demonstrates contempt for both—and for "justice," if by that we mean reversing the maldistribution of wealth that his own policies of deregulation and corporate favoritism have encouraged. Undeterred, Obama presses on with, first, the demand for a ban on using chemical weapons, claiming that his own willingness to launch a military attack on Syria forced the Security Council to act and, implicitly, for Putin and Russia to adopt a more cooperative attitude, and second, the definition of "America's role in the world," particularly US policy "towards the Middle East and North Africa," which policy to hold "during the remainder of my presidency."

The enumeration commences, the caption clause, as it were, being what we've already noted: "The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure these core interests in the region." Even if the core interests were entirely selfless, which they are *not*, the power-orientation and correlative military force are, by international law, out of bounds, in this case, doubly so, because "secur[ing] these core interests in the region" is to arrogate to itself a presence there, as though mentally verging on a divine right since it is stated without self-doubt or compunction. Hence, "the free flow of energy"; dismantling "terrorist networks"; and, "not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction." A decent enough list, but one that is hardly complete, and on "the free flow of energy," it cries out for details, just as, on dismantling "terrorist networks," he claims the right to "take direct action," and on eliminating "weapons of mass destruction" in the region, the complete silence with respect to Israel. But it is when Obama slips in coded language that I must take exception: [I]t is to our interest to see a Middle East and North Africa that is peaceful and prosperous; and will continue to promote democracy, human rights, and *open markets*, because we believe these practices achieve peace and prosperity." (Italics, mine)

It may seem like nit-picking, but an earlier generation of historians of foreign policy would have picked out immediately the phrase "open markets" as part-and-parcel of hegemony, capitalist expansion in the form of the "imperialism of free trade," and a compelling reason for the geopolitical penetration of the region. For Obama, the complete phrase rolls innocently from the tongue, democracy, human rights, and open markets being interchangeable if not indeed identical, as stand-ins for capitalism. As for the rest, he has on his agenda the advancement of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (stacked by a two-state solution which leaves the status quo largely intact, therefore favoring Netanyahu's conception of preconditions), engagement with Egypt (he does not condemn military atrocities and the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood), and the potential for negotiations with Iran over the nuclear issue. All in all, disengagement from the region would be harmful *for* the region, by "creating a vacuum of leadership that no other nation is ready to fill. Bless us, for our selfless humanitarianism.

My *New York Times* Comment on the editorial (Sept. 25), "President Obama at the United Nations," follows:

The question is not whether Obama "can implement a consistent, effective strategy to achieve his goals," as the editorial states, but whether (a) the goals, as he outlines them here, are worth implementing, and (b) whether in fact he has even presented them honestly, or rather, taken emotional, well-worn diplomatic language to disguise the same old policies and programs of US global hegemony. Despite flowery language dressed as

humane and democratic (the signature of Rhodes' speechwriting for POTUS), we see no receding from the declared right of unilateral intervention, justified as in the Rice-Power addendum to Obama's foreign policy, humanitarian interventionism—all, embarrassingly, given that he is addressing the General Assembly, through an explicit avowal of bypassing the UN when deemed necessary.

Nothing has changed—Obama's militarism abroad and contempt for civil liberties at home have been the "consistent" record NYT neither mentions nor figures into the equation. By the latter I mean, if one took what Obama professes to oppose, say, violation of civil liberties, but practices at home, e.g., massive surveillance, use of Espionage Act, etc., there would be grounds for some other power or the international community to invade America! He dares again to use the term "exceptional," as though, although he does not admit, it is intended to confer license to create a National-Security State concomitant with the erosion of the social safety net.

OCTOBER 1, 2013

### Three Cheers for the Shutdown

Terror Tuesday, where Obama and his National-Security Team pore over hit lists to determine whom, by POTUS's personal authorization, will be assassinated next, gives way for now to Shutdown Tuesday, the closing of USG, in defiance of the American stock market and the global financial system, lest its effect would be to prevent the raising of the debt ceiling in mid-October and what that portended both for the failure of making payments on Treasury bonds (a default which will, as they say, *roil* the markets) or for therefore issuing more bonds.

The "shutdown issue," presently mired in the political-ideological battle between the Far Right and the Less-Far Right (House Republicans and Administration Democrats), has little to do with the social welfare of the American people, and instead reveals discernible differences only on the degrees of sophistication informing the programs of each in their determined assistance to corporate capitalism. Republicans in this tableau (a staged presentation going back decades in the roles assumed by each side) are the visceral fascists, striking out at government without realizing how much it helps, assists, and protects business and banking, while Democrats actively, yet with becoming liberal rhetoric to hide from themselves their delusions and treachery, take help, assistance, and protection to a higher level of systemic interpenetration between business and government by means of a regulatory framework written by the affected interests.

Let's put the situation in historical perspective. FDR announced when coming into office that America was a nation one-third ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-fed; today one might say, one-fourth, possibly one-fifth, in a vastly larger population, so that, at minimum, sixty million Americans, in what is reputed to be the richest country in the world, are living, or should I say, existing, at or below the poverty line, and at least a third more barely breaking the surface. When, here, I explicitly call for the government shutdown, it is not to bring on more suffering to the already afflicted, which would follow from a subsequent default, but to clear the air, blow off the fog of false consciousness, and force the issue, especially percolating from below, as to why the distortion of social priorities ( $x$  billions to dictators, past, present, future, around the world;  $y$  billions to US megabanks and AIG; and  $z$  for an all-devouring military machine eating up the nation's resources which might—dare we speak democratically?—otherwise create a vital social safety net) has been allowed and in various guises pursued for more than half a century.

*Shutdown*, ideally, equals *wake-up*, an exposure of widespread impoverishment on one hand, widespread waste, corruption of democratic institutions, and military aggression pure-and-simple on the other. If nothing more, scaring the folks at JP Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs until the legislative conflict is papered over, is worth the candle, considering that nothing will be done for the poor in any case.

Sequestration will ensure the lifeblood of the current American polity and economy, militarism attached to the continuing program of global hegemony, so that neither Republicans nor Democrats find urgency in resolving the present stalemate—and in fact, holding the bottom one-fourth of the people *hostage* to the utter good will of the political system and the consolidated wealth standing behind it, as the source for a solution, is a good lesson in proper obedience, deportment, citizenship. Dangle just enough social- welfare anticipated goodies before the people to ensure quiescence while simultaneously magnifying ideological differences that hardly exist, and one has the perfect formula keeping the masses distracted from the main show—not shutdowns or debt ceilings, but a foreign policy of global capitalist expansion geared to US-defined financial, monetary, and trade advantages, coupled with necessary regime change for their realization, all wrapped in a framework of massive surveillance at home and the quickening paces for demanding patriotism and conformity.

This is not Tea Party fare (and the Republicans as the Partiers' enablers and breeding ground)—akin to geostrategic dumbness abroad, hoped-for Red Scare forays at home, but rather the self-styled liberals and progressives in their ongoing financialization and militarization of the American economy, monopoly capitalism with a smiley face, comfortably lodged in Democratic ranks. Here government shutdown is welcome, because by giving the political-ideological spectrum a still further Rightward push (Republican intransigence as pretext and excuse for Obama's failed presidency, except to those privileged by it), the Democrats somehow appear Left-leaning or centrist. Nonsense. Obama has demonstrated on every count subservience not merely to Wealth, but to its most *atavistic* form: from policies which sanction a rawness of capital accumulation via deregulation, regressive principles of taxation, and subsidies to such favored industries as defense and nuclear power, to social policies which keep working people in a state of suspended animation, their collective bargaining rights weakened, and through lack of job creation, a reservoir of hard-core unemployment resulting in deteriorating standards of living.

On the civil-liberties front, an equal rawness, actuated by the abuses of a saturated counterterrorism atmosphere in which NSA surveillance is a unifying thread for the nuts-and-bolts of a National Security State, from the lack of transparency in government and an over-classification of its documents to the abridgement of freedom of the press in exposing illegal activity and punishment of whistleblowers in Espionage Act prosecutions to the same end. But it is the rawness of military growth and activity under his watch which takes the cake. I have in mind particularly Obama's pivot to the Pacific, and the encirclement of China, and more immediate, the obvious attention to the Middle East, as part of carving out a future still wider sphere of influence in the region.

Is this off-topic? No, precisely because the threat of a shutdown, whether or not it actually materializes, is like a laser beam into Leviathan's brain and/or stomach, revealing contents which normal operations of government successfully cover up. Military, yes; public welfare, no. Yet I hope it comes about, in the hope that it energizes the community of the poor to in fact become so, a

*community* discovering itself, now, as the fulfillment of Dr. King's long-delayed fulfillment of the Poor People's Campaign, to DEMAND an end to militarism, inequality, inadequate educational opportunities, poor housing—after so many years, a turn-around from FDR's description of American poverty, and yes, his defiant call to throw the money-changers out of the temple, so ordinary people can live lives of social decency. The shutdown per se of course would hurt an already hurt to all-intents-and-purposes *underclass*, but if a permanent change is ever to be effected, a class awakening is of absolute importance.

In that regard, Obama and the Democrats, with their liberalization of corporate class-rule, and what I've termed several times the gradual slide into full-scale fascism (surveillance is already a good start, with or without the domestic force-feeding of monopolism and, abroad, aggressive CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, drone warfare, and main forces still in place, along with the elaborate network of military bases), are a greater obstacle to such class awakening than the heavy-handed, Neanderthalish Republicans who are so easy to spot.

Face-saving measures from either side may avoid a shutdown. So what? Either way, the governing classes are against the people.

My Comment on NYT editorial, "Dawn of a New Era in Health Care," Sept. 29, relevant here because Republicans have made Obama's health care plan the issue/pretext for the Shutdown, a plan deeply flawed as herein noted:

The final words of the editorial undercut its overall tone and content: "...that has long been universal in other advanced countries." NYT praises what deserves opprobrium: private insurers riding the government gravy train, rather than the single payer system which ensures a wider safety net and doesn't shove money—our money as taxpayers—into the maw of the gorging Private System. Indeed, those final words are incorrect in one important respect: "other advanced nations." For the US plan places America in the political-structural context of being a DECLINING not an advanced nation. We have sacrificed the people's health on the altar of ideology: market fundamentalism, the natural-rights status of private property, profit before moral decency. Obama = the liberalization of a militarized capitalism, rhetoric glossing over reality.

OCTOBER 4, 2013

### **Obama's Incubatory Tyranny**

Surveillance. Assassination. Teleprompter. Three little words, but, unlike the song, which says, "I love you," these signify incipient fascism in America under the Obama administration, the "love" bestowed on a systemic-structural formation of advanced capitalism increasingly dependent on military means to forestall a declining position of global hegemony. Surveillance is the leading edge of a police state in its massive intrusiveness and potential for the punishment and destruction of dissent. Assassination is the signature modality of so-called counterterrorism, in reality, in its armed-drone application, a flaunting of amoral solipsistic conduct in the world showing contempt for international law and advertising the use of terror without compunction or restraint. Teleprompter here denotes the construction of an image of fluent skillful leadership disguising an empty vessel filled first by Axelrod then Rhodes until, now finally coming into his own, Obama

emerges—still needing artificial means of communication—the *Compleat Beguiler*, spokesperson for America’s ruling groups and, particularly, its military, defense, and financial communities. No longer the empty vessel, although dependent as always on speechwriters for a gloss of liberal rhetoric on policies for articulating and advancing US hegemonic global purposes, Obama has taken rapid strides beyond his predecessors in clamping down a national-security mentality on American ideology and political consciousness.

Three little words, actually the three-cornered stool of a societal formation embarked on a trajectory of corporatism, confirm in practice the underpinnings of repression necessary to stabilize an hierarchical class system in which mega-banking and –business, enjoying the bounty and protection of government, can function free from internal challenge. Obama preaches acquiescence through identification with and pride in the myth of exceptionalism, the 2013 model being humanitarian intervention, but as new models become needed, they are ready to be rolled out the showroom door. Although Waterboarding and rendition appear to be no longer “in” (one of its main practitioners remains Director of the CIA, and the sitting group of Obama’s national-security advisers is hardly a stranger to these practices), next year we shall find, or expect to find, to be the “pivot” the next big thing, only in this case more permanent for the years to come. At this moment, Obama impatiently seeks to clarify, for US geostrategic purposes, the situation in the Middle East, in order to reinforce, and through an elaborate scheme of multipronged diplomatic—bordering on intervention—efforts intensify the security of, America’s sphere of influence in the region on an uncontested basis. Why the impatience? As the term “pivot,” now in wide usage among think-tank devotees, attests through specific Pentagon planning and implementation, the big ticket item, the cynosure of all eyes of Team Obama, is CHINA.

The Middle East may not be old hat in US political-military thinking, not only because America is wedded to Israel’s security, but also because, with Israel as our regional-power fulcrum, American influence can extend in a widening arc embracing Southern Europe and North Africa, with the potentiality of placing pressuring both on Russia and China, *yet* old hat or not, foreign-policy attention has shifted markedly: a new enemy, a new Cold War, and therefore a whole new ballgame for solidifying the popular base on behalf of an enlarged military, the deregulation and strengthening of business and banking to accelerate trends toward monopoly capital, and the consolidation of the whole, with the implication of emergency powers, into the National-Security State. Obama has been on the ground floor of this enterprise from the first, with Geithner, Brennan, and Holder, among the more prominent, assisting in the shaping of an interrelated power structure of financial-military capitalism, stripped of traditional civil liberties, opaque in the workings of government, and increasingly beholden to paramilitary operations for navigating the obstacles of international politics and economics.

Bush II was the patriotic simpleton, Obama now the mellifluous predator to a hitherto credulous—but no longer unsuspecting—world, the more capable of mounting an ambitious program of strategic and economic-ideological dominance than his predecessor because instinctively less restrained about US engagement on a global basis, as witness his escalation of drone attacks, integration of CIA-JSOC joint activities, and international outreach in the cultivation of alliance systems. Under the counterterrorism umbrella, adventurism knows no bounds, especially in areas that Bush showed little interest, whether in Africa or Latin America. In sum, we see with Obama a unitary conception and execution of policy that is undreamed of at the less sophisticated

hands of previous administrations possibly going as far back as Kennedy or Johnson—not because Obama is personally so intelligent, but because global circumstances point to America's asymmetrical posture, declining financial-industrial power, ascending militarism as a way of arresting that decline, the sum of which is desperate measures to postpone or cushion the fall.

The result, so far as his presidency is concerned, is the militarization of liberalism, or the liberalization of militarism, in either case a hardening of attitude toward the social-moral obligations of government as that promoting the health, safety, and general welfare of its people. Obama better than anyone in the recent past demonstrates the unitary character of domestic and foreign policy, inseparable the further one probes but especially prominent in liberal-themed administrations which, qua liberal, reveal their antiradical and probusiness dimensions. In foreign policy, we see an essential counterrevolution in world affairs, as in the maintenance of a two- or possibly three-tiered global economy buttressed by US-controlled international financial organizations, regional trade agreements, and treaty arrangements in regulating capital flows. And aside from this economic display of strength, there is the political aspect: regime change, pure and simple. Globally positioned military bases, ditto CIA stations, and, of course, the employment of foreign aid, all translate into a *presence* not to be discounted in the repression of dissident forces in search of autonomous growth and modernization, socialist or otherwise.

The perfect complement to repression abroad is repression at home, both to cover over, and avoid the criticism of, the use or threat of force in promoting American business, opening investment channels, and securing indispensable natural resources (oil, bauxite, the list is long), and to mold uncritical support for a *total* policy framework which tilts away from the well-being of the domestic society (as in providing for a genuinely-public health system and more generous social safety net than presently exists), instead prosecuting an aggressive foreign policy whose costs alone provide ideological justification for neglect of the welfare sector, interpreted broadly, beyond the safety net, as job creation, mortgage protection, the curbing of pollution, opportunities for higher education, early learning and school nutrition, health-care facilities and coverage comprehensive in scope, and an infrastructure (e.g., water systems, electric grids, sanitation protocols) conducive to healthful surroundings. The comparative lack of the latter, which are the very minimum requirements of domestic society in advanced nations, and hopefully the standard to be achieved by all nations and peoples, can be ascribed to hegemonic standing, largely if not inevitably at the expense of others. To finance militarism, as specifically is being done in America, is *generic rape*, the outrageous violation of the body politic. To countenance it, a collective blankness of mind obtains, homestyle repression, manipulative, patriotic-inducing, rather than overt practices in areas of foreign policy, where national security trumps law, humaneness, and civilized conduct.

The line is breaking down. Repression, like policy in general, is becoming unitary, its domestic locale and provenance being no guarantee of protection of basic rights. How do we know this, aside from celebrity cases like the treatment of Manning, the hounding of whistle-blowers under the Espionage Act, the tight policing of radical demonstrations, formal and informal pressure exerted on the press and other media, lack of government transparency, secret court decisions, and so forth? The answer is simple: go back to our three-legged stool, singly and combined, as at the very least premonitory signs of coming fascism. Surveillance is critically important; the violation of privacy leaves the individual defenseless, in a state of near-bewilderment, stripped down (the case of generic rape I noted) of uniqueness and self-identity, and therefore ripe for re-education, a

politicization of mind leading to adoration of the Leader, extreme fear of making the “wrong” moves, and eating the crumbs cast out by the System. Hardly a flattering picture of democracy. Yet Obama, Holder, and the chain of command in DOJ and NSA persist, openly mocking the Constitution, which, in getting away with this, makes star-chamber proceedings only a matter of time.

Then too, assassination, which is deliberately a crude warning to all and sundry that opposition to US power is futile, the means used, themselves beyond barbarism, vaporizing the victim, leaving a blood spat where once stood a human being. Obama’s resort to this practice very probably won over the intelligence and military communities, as one of the noble warriors who, in the beginning had been mistrusted by both—and quickly proved his worth. Drone assassination is genocide in microcosm, and, with its domestic production and use, not only a surveillance instrument to be widely adopted, but also a reminder of the power of the State—yes, faraway Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, but the nagging doubt, should civil liberties further erode, and counterterrorism lead to the belief that radicals are home-grown terrorists, the same violence meted out to Americans. Already US citizens have been struck abroad, with little stir or recrimination at home.

Finally, the teleprompter, perhaps a cheap shot at Obama, who cannot help that he seems incapable of thinking in an independent voice, much less possess the independence of mind which is not obligated to accepting the suasions of the business community down the line, from environmental destruction to the arcane accounting methods of hedge fund operators, to deregulation per se in practice and the abuses which stem from governmental failure in this regard. Still, more than symbolism is involved in singling-out this method of communication. Obama is enabled to convey a persona thereby completely at odds with his policies and record, including a vindictiveness and unwillingness to be held accountable for his violations of international law. Secrecy is his obsession; my hunch, as I’ve said before, is his fear of being judged guilty of war crimes, whether intervention and threats of it (as in bombing Syria, until much of the international community rebelled) in general, or the drone attacks in particular. He obviously is out for blood with respect to Manning and Snowden, and by his actions warns any similarly inclined of stiff penalties awaiting them. The teleprompter, like a mask, is handy to hide behind: the demagogue without appearing demagogic. He is not a stranger to power.

The term “incubatory” refers to conditions favorable to hatching, here, not full-scale tyranny, but the recognition that the eggs have been planted and institutionally sat on, the while warming and ready to spring out (my use of incipient fascism coincides with this preliminary phase, where the societal preconditions have been set in motion) as the police state, or National-Security State, all but assured in America’s expansionist design, militarism, and distortions introduced in domestic class relations. Obama is a contributing factor to the transition—not the Maximum Leader so much as Servant of the Vested (Including Military) Interests. Meanwhile, as I write, Defense Secretary Hagel, soon to be joined by Secretary of State John Kerry, is on a mission of military-alliance building (Obama follows in two weeks, to the same end), visiting Pacific countries to implement the “pivot” strategy of containment of China, or, as we say in the trade, the “rebalancing” of “assets” including naval power to that end. This policy, somewhat outside the public eye, is, for me, even more damning evidence of incubatory tyranny than the more conspicuous examples—a cause célèbre necessitating still more militarism and the starvation of societal resources for socially humane purposes.

OCTOBER 10, 2013

## **The Militarization of Liberalism**

### **Democracy, Liberalism, Militarism: Capitalist Vitalization**

In a previous article, I suggested the three-legged stool –surveillance, assassination, teleprompter –as basic elements of Obama’s presidency thus far, which, in creating a unitary framework of repression, characterize a stage in America of incipient fascism, one that, as the police-state dimensions of the first, the flagrant violation of international law, via drone warfare in vaporizing human beings, of the second, and the decorative rhetorical flights to facilitate a cosmetic persona in contradiction to actual policy of the third, become more firmly entrenched, as presently appears likely, incipency will develop further into the structural-psychological-military foundations of authoritarianism, probably not on the European model of fascism, but uniquely America’s own. I have no illusions about liberalism in its modern guise: essentially motivated by the rejection of radicalism and offering minor social-welfare legislation as the means of obviating the Left democratization of class, power, and political culture of society, all the while *activating* and protecting capitalism as it assumes monopolistic proportions. Things were obviously simpler in the time of John Locke, where the antecedent property right was transparent and social traits of covetousness were presumably sanctioned by a higher law. One knew where one stood and *why* in the total social order, with ownership of property the defining point about Lockean liberalism. Mention here of that is necessary, because modern liberalism has been so gussied up through propaganda and layers of obfuscation (hence, the teleprompter as shorthand for a brigade of speechwriters on message delivering calculated deception) that its commitment to corporate wealth and, in foreign policy, the National-Security State recedes in the background or is simply taken for granted.

Thus when I refer to the militarization of liberalism, I mean its predisposition to global hegemony, the dedication to Cold War policies, in part, for proving its nonradical credentials, in part, because, in its haste to ward off suspicions of un-Americanism and adopt a posture of super-patriotism, it actually has the conviction that freedom and capitalism are synonymous if not identical, and finally, the gullible belief and pride that capitalist expansion is America’s duty to the world. In all of these cases, militarism is the ratifying condition for their respective realization: militarism, however, sanitized, in keeping with the philosophic image of liberalism as a vehicle of progress (to which militarism now conjoined basks in its prestige). And as the ratifying condition, it, in Cold War terms, provides for successfully mounting an offensive against the Left. In terms of political-ideological respectability, liberalism is enabled to ride the coattails of militarism as the sine qua non of Americanism beyond reproach, while in terms of capitalist expansion, militarism, coupled with the exportation of America’s ideas and institutions, which it has been assigned the task of facilitating, implies liberalism’s moral dimension rooted in exceptionalism, as America’s obligation to share its ideological bounty. Liberalism, without its military underpinnings in America, would lose its utilitarian value for rationalizing financial-market penetration and political-ideological global hegemony, not to say, the current mode, humanitarian interventionism. Otherwise, liberalism would be a toothless tiger, America then requiring a *realpolitik* inviting greater opposition in pursuit of hegemonic goals.

But what, then, of the liberalization of militarism? Most of the foregoing applies, the militarization of liberalism, except that here, where liberalism directly enters the picture as



primarily causal, militarism changes not an iota—yet appears other than itself, a righteous force harnessed to a democratic America (and therefore above reproach), while even the semblance of liberalism as popularly conceived has been utterly disemboweled. Its endorsement of militarism confers goodness on the latter while vitiating the former. Example: drone assassination, personally authorized by POTUS, saves lives by not putting boots on the ground—a selfless America does not nuke its purported enemies. Example: CIA-JSOC covert paramilitary operations for regime change liberate people to fulfill their democratic aspirations so they can welcome US investment and the extraction of their resources. Indeed, the whole panorama of international exploitation, often accompanied by naked and devastating force, becomes somehow an ennobling experience for conqueror and victim alike. Hence, militarism, unchanged in its mission of inflicting destruction and death, and, at home, the regimentation of the people, as in diverting attention to consumption, sports, and, when affordable, absolute greed, as well as coming down hard on dissent, is portrayed through liberalism as strength in the service of all that is deemed Holy, the beribboned generals and admirals, the “noble warriors,” the Stealth Bomber, a mightiness that could only come about because of purity of heart and intention as a nation. With America so good, how could its use of force, its numerous interventions, its global military installations, its *humongous* defense budget, be other than morally right? Liberalization of militarism, the structural-ideological manure pile of US exceptionalism, has been a primary agency for American capitalist development, particularly as it applies to foreign markets and a global context of unimpeded penetration.

Liberalism energizes the forces of authoritarianism, as the quickening pulse-beat of advancing market freedom (what in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries might be termed, the outward thrust—all innocence wherein expansion politically-mentally substituted for the more accurate designation, imperialism, but an imperialism not of territory but of *trade*), a necessarily dynamic process because connoting rapidity of movement and action fused with the thrill of power leading to the equation of liberalism, modernity, and civilization itself. Ask James G. Blaine, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, if that were still possible, and one would find the Battleship Navy or the conquest of markets a subject of congratulation for an expansive democratic nation (!), its democracy verified by the competitive edge it demonstrates in international power-politics. That was then, militarism the means of democratic achievement in the popular mind, without which, democracy—lacking the energy equated with liberalism and militarism—would flounder. It is also NOW, though with fewer illusions about democracy except as measured by the strength of capitalism, its putatively sole legitimate vehicle and avenue of expression, which in the global context of today attaches to democracy a geostrategic vision and framework making of militarism no longer a means but perilously close to becoming an end in itself.

### **Liberalism, Militarism, Capitalism: Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse**

In the Obama Era (if we can dignify the period with his name), perhaps more than ever in America, one finds liberalism, militarism, and capitalism marching in *lockstep*, an integrated framework awaiting the necessary cohesion precisely when, now circumstances having dictated their convergence, the US is losing its superpower status in a newly developing multi-polar world, and avidly seeking its restoration. I noted in the previous article that these “global circumstances [chiefly, the political-economic-military rise of China, but also a reinvigorated Russia under Putin, autonomous currency and trading blocs (EU), and emerging, no longer merely Third World, industrializing nations in their own right, notably Brazil] point to America’s asymmetrical posture,

declining financial-industrial power, ascending militarism as a way of arresting that decline, the sum of which is measures to postpone or cushion the fall.” America is feeling the pinch—Obama, from the standpoint of rejuvenating a by-no-means terminally ill, but still in declining health on all fronts (not least, obviously, the economic) patient, is, although most conservative power-wielders don’t realize it—YET, the right man, in the right place, at the right time: yes, Our Servant of the Vested Interests.

Liberalism, Militarism, Capitalism, the three horsemen of the apocalypse, galloping into the future, work so well together, are so mutually compatible, in the American setting, that it is difficult to distinguish at times which of these is the decisive or motivating force driving the presumed engine of progress. Here I would like to call attention to liberalism, if for no other reason than that the other two can be taken for granted as the society’s structural foundation, requiring only its ideological energization, as supplied by liberalism, to propel the US headlong in its hegemonic pursuits and ambition. Other nations, at least in the past, have credited an ascribable reformism, whether or not they liked it, to liberalism, as in its Good Neighbor mode under the New Deal, or more pointedly Wilsonian internationalism. By now, though, its fusion with militarism and capitalism has become so well known as not to fool anyone but Americans themselves, absent of course those guiding policy, expansion, intervention, military-alliance formations, joint-maneuvers, all the nuts-and-bolts of viable imperialism. When we say liberalism, therefore, it must first be properly qualified to mean, not some vague political territory Left-of-Center dedicated to social-welfare measures having an equalitarian direction, but *property*-centered (as more than Macpherson’s excellent formulation of “possessive individualism,” itself primarily consistent with and applicable to its Lockean origins, and not on its face dependent on military power) for starts, with sophisticated efforts to achieve harmonious class relations while not undermining the foundations of wealth and power in the corporate structure and society’s upper strata, all tied to an expanding capitalism which can rely on government and the military for security. In that case, militarism and capitalism do not come in through the back door but constitute the *raison d’être* for making liberalism practicable as an hegemonic tool.

### **Transitioning to Foreign Policy: Obama’s Pacific-First Strategy**

Taking seriously Obama’s geostrategic framework (coinciding with the wider geopolitical framework, because in both cases sphere of influence and global ambition are at one), not as though it is really *his*, but the product of evolving policy-making over at least two decades, with presently as warlike a bunch of national-security advisers, counterterrorism “experts,” CIA roustabouts (instead of dismantling circus tents, dismantling countries)—enough to make Dr. Strangelove salivate—as to bring it to fruition, one finds the realignment in foreign policy now at hand, the Good Fairy Godfather making it, again under liberalism, perfectly legit. One turns with full attention to China and the Far East in general as America’s predestined—harking back to 19<sup>th</sup> century Manifest Destiny, still very much with us, entwined with both liberalism and exceptionalism—area of dominance, wish-fulfillment struggling to achieve reality. Let’s therefore come up to speed, the events of the last week, with the overall preceding context still in mind. Obama’s Pacific-first strategy, the famous “pivot,” or more fashionable Pentagonese, a “rebalancing,” of military assets, has been cooking for at least two years, this simultaneous with the Middle East still at center stage—and the ubiquitous counterterrorism campaign if not worldwide

then at least focused on Pakistan, Yemen, Somali, etc. America is clearly overextended, its military budget barely keeping pace with its grandiose so-called commitments.

Enter China, waiting in the foyer of the American mindset until the proper time. What this suggests is, first, the Obama administration is tilting away from domestic to the more comfortable and seemingly productive realm of foreign policy (it had accomplished much that it had set out to do: deregulation, promotion of monopolism, the maintenance of class differentiation of wealth and power, carried over in the failure of job creation and failure to strengthen the social safety net, especially in light of widespread poverty and unemployment, and more-than-generous support of the military budget), and second, its and Obama's own personal exasperation and frustration with the Middle East, as though, having nailed down a formidable presence in the region, centered on safeguarding Israel's security, including threats made to Iran, there wasn't much more to be done except holding the line, stasis, not dynamism, in the execution of policy, a not very attractive option for the display of American force, in which the long-term perspective implies a bogging down, to be avoided where and when possible. The Middle East would not be abandoned, but there were more important fish to fry—a Far East beckoning America for multiple reasons.

Here the convergence of liberalism, militarism, and capitalism bears fruit in the focalization of military power. Team Obama perceives China as the principal challenge to American global power. Putin's interference with the US bombing of Syria was an unwelcome interruption, but Russia, Europe, the Middle East, all seemed passé in comparison with the challenges posed by the Far East, and not least, also the economic opportunities of "serving" a vast market-area and protecting our "friends and allies" in the Pacific region. Ergo, the accelerated push to implement the Pacific-first strategy witnessed in the last few days. Somewhat thwarted in the West, America turns to the East, inviting confrontation by its actions, almost as if to replicate a Middle East in the Far East, with South Korea the Israel of the Pacific. Sound mind-boggling? No, the US thirsts for action as the lifeblood of systemic growth, or, realistically, maintenance and/or preventing further systemic devolution, in which case the Far East opens a vista in which our three horsemen of the apocalypse can wander freely in green pasture while giving evidence of American prowess, to reinforce, vital to the US's identity, the ideology of strength-via-exceptionalism.

### **Transpositional Context, Old to New Cold War: Search for Reinvigorated Capitalism**

The scene is ready-made for a replay of events of an earlier time, the Cold War, regurgitated in the new setting, yet with the principal actors as standing in for the old players—and in spirit, amorphously, the older theme of anticommunism refurbished, now, as counterterrorism. However illogical all of these associations, given the different social forces and stages of development involved (which is why history does not exactly repeat itself), the mental-set receptive to such a transposition of periods, enemies, and conflicts, far longer in the making than the Pacific-first strategy, is inscribed so deeply in the American psyche, riddled as it is with xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and an authoritarian bent favoring leadership in all its forms, that its having been taken hold by the nation at large makes perfect sense in the search for *new* modes of invigoration and the exhibition of power. Here then we see the accounts of the flurry of diplomatic activities of this past week, and as I wrote this I imagined a precocious nine-year-old asking, Why are diplomatic missions centered on building military alliances? For Secretary of State Kerry and Secretary of Defense Hagel, the question strikes home, their tours of duty, if you will, having nothing else but that, and afford insight into what the military configuration is intended to be, with

China paired with North Korea's today's axis of evil (the perceived threat from each multiplied by combination with the other) and Japan encouraged to rearm—something the Abe government is delighted to hear—as a security partner facing down both North Korea and China. This is not to forget the Philippines, which is seen by military planners as a staging area for the employment of air and naval power par excellence—here, as with the others, China always in the cross-hairs (with North Korea, because somehow more feared as a supposedly loose cannon, advantageously brought in to further—guilt by association—the menacing image of China).

If the US, in large, represents the comprehensive pattern of global counterrevolution, China and the Far East can be subsumed therein, but in a special way seldom seen before: Anti-communism no longer fits the bill, and as I shall point out, testimony on the best authority, our capitalist bosom friend, Paulsen, among other things architect, as Treasury Secretary under Bush, of the notorious bank bailout, and, of course, president of Goldman Sachs, is high on China's capitalist dimensions and future prospects, so that counterrevolution has reference to *intracapitalist* rivalries as well as that between capitalism and socialism. This makes the Obama attraction to confrontation with China that much more difficult to decipher, as though power *sui generis* has become a self-devouring end in its own right, even capitalism now pressed into its service, and militarism, by definition, elevated still further in national esteem and patriotic fervor. These guys play tough. The more capitalism is assumed and taken for granted, as in the case of Obama, the more justifiable becomes the use of force in its growth and protection, a reification, as Marxists might have it, of capitalism already replete with militarism as central to its composition. In that case, we have left John Locke and Adam Smith far behind. New men and women (a bow to Susan Rice and Samantha Power, warriors supreme in the name of Humanity) are wanted and feel fully up to the task of arresting America's global military-political decline and, though the connection is only dimly made, also, at home, the structural-financial dislocations of the system as a whole.

In that way, the National-Security State can be preserved, the military budget stuck in the stratosphere, surveillance kept up round-the-clock with scarcely a whimper, in sum, the preservation of America as we have come to know it, *business as usual*, warts and all, including intervention, targeted assassination, an alarming growth of Executive Power, yet, with that much consolidated, also the platform for striking out in what may prove a qualitative step (I hesitate to say, forward). Obama's Pacific-first strategy is quite possibly the first movement in the orchestration of the authoritarian path to which the United States is being led, this over and above wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, covert activities worldwide, surveillance, secrecy in government, and other increasing signs, economic, ideological, psychological, of a disturbing nature. We've seen major activity taking place in the last week, non-determinative in themselves yet more than worrisome in making Pacific-first, alias, the pivot, alias, rebalancing, an irreversible course of action fraught with danger that we might all be blown to smithereens and if not, witnessing the drastic curtailment of civil liberties. October 2-3, Hagel and Kerry (Cohn and Schine of McCarthyism fame now updated), sent on missions to the Pacific, have under the guise of diplomacy actually enmeshed America still further than before in a self-chosen, military-inspired framework of Far Eastern confrontation, with the avowed purpose of containing China and ensuring support for leaders in the surrounding countries (North Korea naturally excepted) who conform to US policy-dictates—the works: drone bases, naval installations, army and marine encampment, and, if other interventions—we can call this *that*—be our guide, status-of-forces agreements exempting servicemembers from local civil and criminal prosecution.

## **China, as American Psychological Construct: Enemy Required for Achieving Moral Vindication**

In various forms, most notably, the Open Door, the “pivot” strategy has been around for a long time, but not specifically as the shift of attention from Europe to the Far East, and rather, Asian markets had been prized in their own right, especially as Europe and the Middle East, until World War I, appeared already taken up by other Powers, including the British and Ottoman Empires. If the Caribbean was viewed as an American Lake, the Pacific also implied US custodianship, at least as a goal. Thus, Asian markets were seen as an object of fascination building well-before Obama’s time, this fascination, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century underwritten by naval power (Mahan, TR, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, all pressing for the Battleship Navy), and continuing through to the present, with the application of the domino theory to Vietnam less an exception than an explicit power- rather than market-orientation. Nevertheless we see, despite continuities of interest, a basic difference now, which can be ascribed to America’s own fall from grace at the top of the pyramidal structure of world power. Markets, of course—capitalism never turns a blind eye to maximizing its advantages. Outsourcing as well—American manufacturing searches for the rock- bottom with respect to labor costs to increase its profits. Yet China looms still larger in the American policy-psyche as somehow the key to US rejuvenation and moral vindication, a Garden of Eden of youthful capitalism on the prowl for market opportunities, not the senescent mature phase content with ever-slimmer pickings as China makes successful inroads into Latin America and Africa while secure in its home market. Confrontation with China seems a *must* if the US is to hold its place in the world.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” digging into the psychodynamics of this social disease, said that if there were no Jews, the anti-Semite would have to *invent* them, in order to feed and sustain his phobias and hatreds. In like manner, I believe that China is America’s salvation, even more than the Soviet Union in the decades following World War II: If China did not exist, we would have had to invent it. Functionally, it feeds our appetite for orthodoxy, conformity, hatred of difference—the operant word all these years, anticommunism—by casting *our* phobias and hatreds into the moral (?) light of self-righteousness. To be more exact, China, like Russia before it (despite Mao and the Chinese Revolution, and the China Lobby, the AIPAC of its day in trying to shape opinion, Americans were not condemnatory about China in the way that we were about the Soviet Union until perhaps the 1980s), and the Cold War taken as a whole, served to unify the nation so that its internal trends of monopolization, militarization, and the relative impoverishment of the populace (for the bottom 20%, absolute, not relative), can continue unabated, free alike from socialism, workers’ movements, an independent Left demanding a welfare state and the public control of industry and banking.

Whether as invention or demonization, China *does exist* so that neither of the two is rational, however viable in launching the Pacific-first / pivot / rebalancing strategic framework, itself both liable to open a can of worms, and also, inadvertently, shed light on the further social-control tinkering at home in the more visible realm: can of worms—tensions conceivably leading to a massive land war, or more likely, thermonuclear war; social-control tinkering: manipulation, similar to the treatment of China, of the psychodynamics of counterterrorism to engender the mood of political conformity and, via a sub-rosa antiradicalism in all things, encourage the shrinkage of the ideological spectrum, practically eliminating the Left altogether. Because China does exist,

America, with that target before us, can now once again entertain the idea of war, war preparations, or, as is already happening (with or without China in view, but much easier and accomplishable *with*), even a mental habituation to a state of readiness. What I referred to in a previous article, incubatory tyranny comes into its own

#### **1. 5. Pacific-First, Panetta's Trial Run: "Enhanced [Military] Capabilities to this Vital Region"**

Never was a Nobel Peace Prize so ill-deserved. Before this most recent step of the Big Launch into Asia, one should recall Obama's preliminary move, his Defense Secretary at the time, Leon Panetta, on a trip to the Pacific, June 1, 2012—more than a year ago, a scouting trip to buttress military alliances, signal America's military-determination to be a, if not *the* regional power, and, by enumerating the "assets" planned and to be put in place, scare hell out of China (it didn't work!). Jane Perlez, writing in the *New York Times* on that date, the article accurately if menacingly titled, "Panetta Outlines New Weaponry for Pacific," states that Panetta, "seeking to persuade a skeptical audience of Asian officials here [Singapore] on Saturday that the United States is committed *to enhancing its military presence in the region* despite coming budget constraints, unveiled the most detailed inventory to date of planned new weapons for the region." (italics, mine) So much is interesting: the acknowledged objective, a military presence, the detailed revelation of weaponry, but also, a theme recurring up through today, that despite budget constraints, which most worried "Asian officials" that Obama was not serious, hence their skepticism, Panetta was there to reassure them that constraints notwithstanding, the military budget, at least here, would not be stinted. We see, then, the underside of sequestration—social safety net, sure, military needs, implementing the Pacific-first strategy, no (and as a general proposition, compared with social programs, the Pentagon would suffer little).

Panetta was loquacious, Father Christmas in bestowing the goodies of war. First the reconfiguration of naval forces, "from a 50-50 split between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific to 60 percent of the Navy's assets assigned to the Pacific Ocean." This may not seem earth-shaking, but I cannot emphasize enough how aptly the "pivot" fits into a renewed (measured by the earlier Cold War) militarism which, with the overlay of counterterrorism and surveillance, and yes, the Manning and Snowden revelations, portends if not a sea-change in the American polity, at least the authoritarian pathway already noted. Nor was a 60-40 split chickenfeed, for as Perlez summarizes: "The renewed emphasis on the Pacific would involve six aircraft carriers, and a majority of the Navy's cruisers, destroyers, littoral combat ships and submarines. These would be fortified by an increase in the number and size of military exercises in the Pacific, and a greater number of port visits." What China must have been thinking, even before this, one can only guess, and in any case, Panetta's statement surely known to its leadership must have stirred some interest: "Make no mistake—in a steady, deliberate and sustainable way—the United States military is rebalancing and *brings enhanced capabilities* to this vital region." (Italics, mine) Obama is not known to have expressed dissent to this view—obviously his own as well.

War anyone? The article points out, "Among the specific new weapons Mr. Panetta mentioned were the advanced fifth-generation aircraft known as the Joint Strike Fighter, the enhanced Virginia-class fast-attack submarine that can operate in shallow and deep waters, new electronic warfare and communications capabilities, and improved precision weapons." Further down: "The new panoply of weapons specially designed for the distances of the Pacific included an aerial-refueling tanker, a bomber, and advanced maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, Mr.

Panetta said.” The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the commander of the United States Pacific Command accompanied him. And this was 2012, when much thought and preparation had already been given to the rebalancing act.

### **US-Japan Broadened Security Alliance: Hagel, Kerry, and Japanese Rearmament**

Jumping ahead to this past week, we see Hagel stepping into Panetta’s shoes without missing a beat, and, if anything, more engaged in Asia as the coming front for establishing America’s presence, i.e., confrontational stance, with respect to China, for he—along with Obama, perhaps less so, Panetta—has added greater complexity to the situation: fuller assurances and guarantees to the military alliances, e.g., the Philippines and, significantly, South Korea, because in that case, it was expected to contain the second heinous enemy, North Korea. Perhaps that is why Hagel is spending four days in South Korea—“the longest stay of an American defense secretary in a generation,” reports Jennifer Steinhauer in her NYT article, “Back in Asia, Hagel Pursues Shift to Counter China’s Goals in Pacific,” Oct. 2. She writes, Hagel “is forging ahead with a military agenda that reflects the Obama administration’s rising security and economic interests in the region and his own [Hagel’s] passions for Asia.” Three trips to the region as defense secretary, “after only seven months on the job.” He is very much Obama’s point man, so much for expecting a change!

At his news conference (Oct. 2), along with South Korea’s defense minister, Hagel emphasized, in the reporter’s account, that “the Asian rebalance is a priority,” and in his own words provided a succinct statement of what that meant: “You always adjust your resources to match your priorities.” Nor, as we’ve seen, were the resources negligible. A pacifist, he’s not. One senses that although China remains of uppermost concern, there is from Panetta to Hagel a policy shift, the pairing of North Korea with China as potential enemies—or, in the language of Washington, potential security threats, for standing at the demilitarized zone, the most provocative symbol of tension, Hagel said, “This is probably the only place in the world where we have always a risk of confrontation. There is no margin of error up here.” He is now off to Japan, where the US position is fraught with danger, encouragement of Japanese rearmament.

Steinhauer and Martin Fackler have the story in The Times (Oct. 3), “Japan and U.S. Agree to Broaden Military Alliance,” a hoped-for policy among American defense specialists and national-security advisers for quite some time, in anticipation of Japan’s role in the containment of China, but now accelerated with Hagel and Kerry “meeting with their Japanese counterparts” and signing on that day a specific agreement. The reporters’ opening statement says it all: “The United States and Japan agreed on Thursday to broaden their security alliance, expanding Japan’s role while attempting to show American determination to remain a dominant presence in the region.” This, in response to “growing challenges” from China and North Korea. The details are chilling: “The agreement calls for construction of a new missile-defense radar system in Japan, deployment of American drone aircraft here for the first time and joint efforts to combat cyberattack threats, among other steps.” Assurances were given that Pentagon budget-cuts would not alter the “security alliance,” and that the US looked with favor on Shinzo Abe’s effort to “put his country on a more equal footing [i.e., its “military capabilities”] with its longtime military protector.” As Hagel put the matter, “Our bilateral defense cooperation, including America’s commitment to the security of Japan, is a critical component of our overall relationship, and to the Obama administration’s rebalance to Asia-Pacific.” This meant involvement in the dispute over “a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea,” in which the US would have Japan’s back. The agreement also

allowed the US “to place a new X-band radar system” near Kyoto, “to better protect both countries against military threats from North Korea.” There was more, concerning military hardware, *and* the possibility of changing the “pacifist Constitution” so that Japanese forces could fight alongside those from the US.

John Kerry, who appears, like Tony Blair to Bush, as Obama’s lap dog, made this statesmanlike pronouncement: “Our relationship has never been stronger or better than it is today. We are continuing to adapt, however, to confront the different challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” What might those challenges be? He added, “A rising China is welcome as long as that China wants to engage according to international standards.” With statesmen like these, who needs generals? I see incubatory tyranny, possibly even painless (to all but those who dissent), ever closer; and, regrettably, under the banner of liberalism. But let’s continue, for no mention has yet been made of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, presumably one that is in the spirit of Wilsonian-liberal free trade, yet another entrepot for US power and influence in the region, military and economic alike.

### **Trans-Pacific Partnership: Economic Stalking Horse for Military Predominance**

Trans-Pacific is actually a good deal worse than one imagines. Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, and Ben Beachy, its research director, have written an article in The Times, “Obama’s Covert Trade Deal,” back on June 2, 2013, which, if taken seriously (apparently it has not been), would or should have stopped it in its tracks—and exposed the hollowness of Obama’s liberalism, as conventionally understood. *Secrecy* fits nicely into the jigsaw puzzle of authoritarianism, along with surveillance and other measures which violate the principles of democratic government, and in this case it is Trans-Pacific’s most prominent feature. Wallach and Beachy pull no punches: “The Obama administration has often stated its commitment to open government. So why is it keeping such tight wraps on the contents of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the most significant international commercial agreement since the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995?” Good question—a “covert trade deal”?

One’s initial guess as to why, consistent with other precedents established by Obama, is that in the guise of a trade agreement the US is attempting to impose conditions on the region, including on non-trade matters as well, which cover all bases on political-economic hegemony, thereby accomplishing two things: the projection in detail of constraining practices, uniformly applied, that conduce to the welfare of American capitalism; and the projection of power in the form of a tightly woven sphere of influence that, although not strictly part of the agreement, would have military significance in the campaign to isolate and contain China. If I might suggest, good trading partners make good military allies, as in the discussions to create a trade agreement with EU members currently underway. What emerges with Trans-Pacific goes beyond the economic factor per se, to what appears as a relationship of dictated power and dependence, what in franker times we labeled as imperialism, and although Obama is not often shy about the practice itself (never admitting its true nature) the reason for secrecy is compelling: the stench reaches even off the page; secrecy because the agreement’s provisions cannot stand the light of day.

### **(Detailed Provisions, Anti-Regulatory, Benefiting US Capital**

The writers state: “The agreement, under negotiation since 2008, would set new rules for everything from food safety and financial markets to medicine prices and Internet freedom. It would include at least 12 of the countries bordering the Pacific and be open for more to join.”



Significantly, Congress, which has “exclusive constitutional authority to set the terms of trade,” has been excluded from the trade process, its members denied “repeated requests...to see the text of the draft agreement” or even “to attend negotiations as observers,” a clamping down of secrecy extended to “other groups” affected by the rewriting of “broad sections of nontrade policies,” their demands for the public release of the “nearly complete text” rejected. Even the Bush administration, the writers point out, “hardly a paragon of transparency, published online the draft text of the last similarly sweeping agreement, called the Free Trade Area of the Americas in 2001.”

Secrecy, however, is highly flexible. One set of rules applies to Congress and the people, another to mega-business and banking—again faithfully following the Obama paradigm of selective treatment of the wealthy and powerful. They note, “There is one exception to this wall of secrecy: a group of 600 trade ‘advisers,’ dominated by representatives of big businesses, who enjoy *privileged access* to draft texts and negotiators.” (Italics, mine) The stench is getting greater, for slipped into a trade agreement are matters which, for this colossal region (equal to or greater than other spheres of influence), define rules of conduct the mirror-image of what Obama has done for, or rather *to*, salient features of the US political economy. “This covert approach,” they continue, “is a major problem because the agreement is more than just a trade deal. Only 5 of its 29 chapters cover traditional trade matters, like tariffs or quotas. The others impose parameters on nontrade policies.” Here I may be overly suspicious, but I detect the following strategy: Place in the agreement desiderata not yet achieved in the US, thus forcing changes here—obviously unpopular, that might not otherwise take place—so as to stay in compliance. They say as much, in a single sentence: “Existing and future American laws must be altered to conform with these terms, or trade sanctions can be imposed against American exports.” It is hardly likely that we would draft provisions that would hurt ourselves.

One area dear to American capital is copyright protection. In early 2012 there was heated debate over the Stop Online Piracy Act, which would have penalized “even the most minor and inadvertent infraction of a company’s copyright,” creating an “uproar” which “derailed the proposal.” No longer. The case is instructive of corporate planning onto a wider plane: “But now, the very corporations behind SOPA are at it again, hoping to *reincarnate its terms* within the Trans-Pacific Partnership’s sweeping proposed copyright provisions.” (Italics, mine) If you are temporarily stalled at home, enlarge the playing field, force others into obedience, and celebrate with victory at home. It gets worse—although the writers fail to make any connection whatever, Trans-Pacific makes a mockery of Obama’s health care plan by the protection it affords to mega-pharmaceuticals in preventing restrictions on price-maintenance (the industry representatives influencing the drafting process). Incidentally, we see how the writers cracked the secrecy walls: “From another leak, we know the pact would also take aim at policies to control the cost of medicine. Pharmaceutical companies, which are among those *enjoying access* to negotiators as ‘advisers,’ have long lobbied against government efforts to keep the cost of medicine down. Under the agreement, these companies could challenge such measures by claiming that they undermined *their new rights* granted by the deal.” (Italics, mine)

As for outsourcing, they write: “And yet another leak revealed that the deal would include even more expansive incentives to relocate domestic manufacturing offshore than were included in Nafta—a deal that drained millions of manufacturing jobs from the American economy.” Take that, liberals and progressives, into your pipe and smoke it! Yet Obama remains untouchable in those

quarters. Nor, in this itemization, would one want to leave Wall Street out—for what is an Obama /Democratic program without partiality on that end, in this case the internationalization of exotic financial instruments, as if 2008 had never happened? Thus they write: “The agreement would also be a boon for Wall Street and its campaign to water down regulations put in place after the 2008 financial crisis. Among other things, it would practically forbid bans on risky financial products, *including the toxic derivatives* that helped cause the crisis in the first place.” (Italics, mine)

At some point, Congress will have to vote, at which time the text would be made public. “So why,” they ask, “keep it a secret?” And their answer, which bears on Obama’s enlargement of Executive Power, as well as his deviousness (no disrespect intended!), is this: “Because Mr. Obama wants the agreement to be given fast-track treatment on Capitol Hill. Under this extraordinary and rarely used procedure, he could sign the agreement before Congress voted on it. And Congress’s post-facto vote would be under rules limiting debate, banning all amendments and forcing a quick vote.” Even Mayor Daley in his heyday would have blushed at such ramrod tactics. Wallach and Beachy close: “Whatever one thinks about ‘free trade,’ the secrecy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership process represents a huge assault on the principles and practice of democratic governance. That is untenable in the age of transparency, especially coming from an administration that is otherwise so quick to trumpet its commitment to open government.” But why be surprised? When I speak of Obama’s incubatory tyranny I have examples like this in mind, in and of themselves not definitive, yet that they can happen puts us on notice of the need to correlate the cases, examine the underlying interrelatedness, and, above all, recognize even a single one—be it assassination, surveillance, or deregulation—would not be possible without summoning the full political-institutional structure of society to bring it forward.

### **Obama’s No-Show: The Military Card, Little Else to Offer**

Trans-Pacific does not occur in a policy-vacuum; it is intimately related to the military-alliance systems being negotiated by Hagel and Kerry. Obama ducks the pending conferences, pleading domestic issues, the shutdown and debt-ceiling battles, are keeping him away. That is just as well, with Hagel and Kerry his emissaries saving him the potential embarrassment of being identified with probusiness measures when the terms of the agreement and how they were arrived at are finally revealed, although to his credit (or blame) Obama does not embarrass easily, merely instead grows more petulant and vindictive. I think the deeper reason for Obama’s not showing up is his fear of going head-to-head with Xi Jinping, who has far more to offer the Asian Pacific countries and greater resources for doing so. China already is running circles around the US in Africa (as I’ve written before, noting for example the soccer fields and municipal amenities under construction—no questions asked), and I assume that Obama, for reasons of American demandingness and blatant rudeness, has little to fall back on except the military card. Trans-Pacific, in maximizing American self-interest, will not stand up to alternative modes, the Chinese model, of modernization and development.

Jane Perlez, the *Times* reporter in Beijing, carries our analysis a step further by her article, “Cancellation of Trip by Obama Plays to Doubts of Asia Allies” (Oct. 4), in which she focuses on Asian Pacific leaders and governments all too eager to come under the US defense umbrella, therefore willing partners in an American-defined trading framework and alliance system, whatever, I surmise, their peoples might wish to the contrary. Their criticism of Obama might have been scripted by Netanyahu for all the bravado and belligerence they display, stating that Obama cannot

be trusted against China when he is squeamish about bombing Syria and apparently folding on Iran. Obama of course wants to prove them wrong; in reading their responses, these leaders and academics in the region give one the sense that he and his national-security advisers are preaching to the choir, a common mindset of Reaction holding both groups together. This makes Xi's diplomatic triumphs all the more surprising and interesting, as though even those in our proverbial pocket know there will ultimately be a day of reckoning.

Perlez writes that as Obama "made apologetic calls to Asia to cancel his trip," Xi "was taking a star turn in some of the same countries Obama would have visited." He "became the first foreigner to address the Indonesian Parliament, offering billions of dollars in trade" to that country, and then went on to Malaysia, which was hosting the two Asian summits that Obama had planned to attend, a cancellation making Asians wonder if the US "will be a viable counterbalance to a rising China." Not only "Obama's U-turn on intervention in Syria," but his failure to put down the revolt of the House, counted against him in their eyes. By not standing up to China, "Asian officials" feared, "the gravitational pull of China's economy [would be] increasingly difficult to resist." The Philippines appears Rightist even by Asian standards, as can be seen in the question posed by an adviser to its Congress: "How can the United States be a reliable partner when President Obama can't get his own house in order?" The questioner doubts that the US is "really in the position to come to our aid in the event of a military conflict." More of the same from others, though not surprising, because the views represented are expressed by those who have been carefully cultivated through contact with American aid and other programs. One official (Singaporean) was frank "in rare public criticism" of the US, stating that it was "not exerting sufficient countervailing economic influence."

### **China: The Long-Haul Strategy for Regional Influence**

Here the battle is joined. In the US, "countervailing economic influence" is a nonstarter, because the influence preferred affecting foreign policy is military rather than economic, and, insofar as economic, the strings attached are not calculated to win hearts and minds. In contrast, as Perlez relates, China has "mounting investments in Southeast Asia," as in establishing "a \$50 billion Chinese infrastructure bank, to rival banks influenced by the United States." Our Singaporean called these investments "no longer 'just a matter of business' but '*a core Chinese interest*,' as if to emphasize partly noneconomic factors at play—not military, I should think, but ideological in character, in which "infrastructure" suggests forging alignments based on common interest and harmonious relations. I may be wrong in portraying Chinese intentions in this light, but selflessness doesn't have to enter. Stable relations, founded on improved conditions, does. In sum, "a core Chinese interest" implies the longer-term view (one that we see in China domestically in its willingness to tackle such challenges as the massive campaign of urbanization). In this context of growing competition between America and China, where exercising power and influence in Asia characterizes the ambitions of both, it would be well to remember Perlez's point that this "is not to say the United States will lose its standing in the region it has long dominated anytime soon." And to underscore the point, she adds: "The presence of tens of thousands of American troops in Japan and South Korea, and naval fleets roaming the Pacific, add to that projection of power."

This past week Hagel's visit to South Korea and Japan and Kerry's to Japan were "for talks to beef up the American alliances with those two countries," in Japan, especially, agreements being signed allowed "the deployment of drones there for the first time," and implied support for "Japan's slow but steady moves to strengthen its once powerful military." The rearmament of Japan surely

must have worried China and other nations with memories of World War II, a factor which, despite pro-American feelings of conservative regimes, created a sense of ambiguity to their policy-making. Indonesia is a good example, where, according to Rizal Sukma, director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, initial mistrust was giving way to a favorable view: “I would call Indonesia’s attitude towards China now as ‘a display of growing comfort amid persistent ambiguity.’” While “it values economic opportunities offered by China,” it remains “anxious” about China’s intentions. The observation has value, and whether or not there is criticism of the US, fear of Chinese expansion is real. Yet the economic factor is beginning to carry greater weight. In Xi’s Jakarta speech he said “China expected to reach one trillion dollars of trade with the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations by 2020.” According to an Australian economist, “all countries in Asia, except the Philippines, now count China as their chief trading partner.”

Obama’s failure to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting on Bali, and then the East Asia Summit in Brunei, meant he was “ceding Mr. Xi plenty of ground.” This is important because Obama had planned to push, at the first, for the Trans-Pacific—to which, significantly, the US had “not invited China to join the 12-member group, and China views it as a tool to contain it.” Perlez makes clear what one suspects all along. The Trans-Pacific Partnership was conceived to work in tandem with the “pivot” or Pacific-first strategy, less as carrot-and-stick than economic cover for building the military presence in the Far East. Obama, hoping Trans-Pacific would show the policy to be “not only military but economic,” was being beaten at his own game, because Xi, in his absence, “will be able to push a counter trade grouping favored by China, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership,” which includes more Asian countries than Trans-Pacific *and* pointedly excluded the US, just as China had been excluded by the other. We’ll give the editor of the Jakarta Post the last word: Xi “is winning the hearts and minds in the right places,” and even had Obama shown up in Bali, he would have been given a “less warm reception.”

### **Quandary: Is Capitalist Expansion Only for Capitalism? The Murky Waters of Power**

The issue was joined by the existence of these two mutually exclusive trade plans, and in spite of fears of China, Trans-Pacific, shrouded in secrecy, and having the potential threat of military reinforcement on its shoulders, would not have clear sailing, but rather, merely exacerbate tensions between the US and China—*perhaps* Obama’s goal from the start. What is vexing, however, is how to interpret America’s confrontational posture, over and above the evident attraction of embarking on yet another crusade to unify the American people around war, intervention, and most recent, in the history of antiradicalism in America, the willingness to surrender traditional guarantees of civil liberties while pursuing an agenda of unrestrained capital accumulation. This is a re-play of periods where wealth-concentration made great strides in the past, and “communism” in its various epithetical names, such as labor militancy, was dusted off as a sacrifice to the gods of war and corporate greed while effectively silencing dissent. But even so, the whole opposition to China makes little sense in terms of conventional Left social analysis.

### **Inherent Problems of Conceptualization: A Psychology of Dichotomization**

Here one expects traditional ideological conflict, capitalism vs. socialism, borne out by internal social struggles in America, as for example, the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the history of industrial violence before and, to a lesser extent, since, where working people defending their right to organize were assumed, whether or not true, to be engaged in class struggle (for radicals, the wish

was often father to the interpretation), a conceptualization of conflict also projected onto the international plane. The US affinity for counterrevolution confirms the supposition of a Left-Right confrontation, America usually siding with the Right, so that, as in the Cold War, whenever conflict arose, the dichotomy of forces had for explanation what became a demonization of the Left, with the American public expected to rally to the cause—social patriotism predicated on a deep psychological reservoir of antiradicalism, whether or not the shoe fit. The enemy was treated as monolithic, different, radical. Without the enemy in the guise that we had come to expect, there would be little grounds for antagonism and ideology would lose its powers of persuasion. What then of *capitalist rivalries*, which, internationally, were so evident prior to the Bolshevik Revolution?

There perhaps a different mindset was involved, where capitalist rivalries—the constant factor being capitalism, although reflecting different stages of development—made necessary a nonideological source of conflict, and hence, the transposition of capitalism to nationalism, the fighting nevertheless of equal ferocity. But with socialism, the world changed; the capitalist community became unified at the expense of the outsider, viewed as a common threat to all, and the search was on, within capitalism, to stabilize the world system as the security of capitalism through international political, economic, and financial organizations, both to iron-out difficulties among the peer group *and* exclude the Menacing Other, unless it was willing to play by the rules of the game and gave promise of changing for the better, to become capitalist itself. When Kerry said, “A rising China is welcome as long as *that* China wants to engage according to international standards,” (Italics, mine) he was doing three things: prejudging China as still communist, making “that” China toe the mark, which in turn meant accepting and engaging the (capitalist) world through American-defined ground rules, which no doubt included the absolute sanctity of property, low tariffs, and honoring contracts.

### **Internalizing the Cold War: China, Socialist Pariah-Scapegoat**

A radical analysis could deal with both capitalist-socialist and intracapitalist conflict, but on China, I submit, it fails to deal with the Obama-Phenomenon—not confined to him and his administration, but historically timed so as to warrant the designation in the present situation: namely, a refusal to break through the ideological stereotypes and persist in seeing Red China despite overwhelming evidence of its capitalist dimensions. Radicals therefore, if such analysis were forthcoming, misjudge the stupidity and arrogance of US leadership, even discounting for the changes taking place in China, by—and this is all hypothetical, because by radical I am thinking only of a conventional and consistent Marxist pattern—assuming America’s defense of capitalism was the issue. Not here. Obama leads us on a merry chase by having so completely internalized the Cold War mentality that he is in a rush to confront China as supposedly the ideological enemy, at least thus speaketh my nonexistent writer.

What, though, if China were in fact capitalist? Then all the balderdash (aka, red-baiting) about menace, world danger, communist enslavement of the people (insinuated rather than stated—even in the Kerry statement), would fly out the window, and then where would we be, in mobilizing the people for a state of war, accepting the destruction of privacy in our lives, allowing counterterrorism to shape the national agenda and mentality, and a thousand and one abuses at the hands of the Obama administration? As radicals, we must expose the nuttiness of the conflict, or better, search for its underlying purposes, in which capitalism still plays a vital part, its expansion to

the Far East integral to America's remaining a superpower and avoiding a more precipitate decline than it is already suffering. But I want to take the extra step, looked at askance in a Marxist analysis.

Capitalism does not say it all—even when Obama deliberately misinterprets what he sees before his eyes. China qua communist or socialist is a useful whipping-boy, but *as capitalist* we must be prepared for another interpretation. America is deeply afraid of its fate in the world. The Pacific-first strategy has wider intentions than the isolation and containment of China (itself a tall order beyond US means), the desire for a total configuration of power in which all, China especially, is in economic vassalage to the United States, and with that, ideological-cultural tutelage as well. Humanitarian interventionism fills the bill nicely—when one is dealing with weaker powers, but laughable in the case of China. Although the configuration has to remain nameless (Pax Americana might be good for starters), it has been in the making for two centuries, John Quincy Adams a useful departure point, but never so categorically invested with militarism as the propelling force, as though we have Sultan Obama of the Ottoman Empire now turned more lethal. Be all of the foregoing as it may, the primary fact here is that China has become capitalist, and all of the ideological trappings and delusions that say it has not, whether for purposes of rigid ideology or social-control over the American people, must be stripped away, and frank acknowledgement of Imperialist Ambitions made—then we'll see how many answer the clarion call of the bugle, or thrill to the flyover of the Stealth bomber at football halftime.

### **Ideological Mindset of Power: Subsuming Capitalism in Authoritarian Framework**

That China is not harboring revolutionary ideas, still less, exporting them to other countries, suggests the US has to re-approach international politics and economics in the global context of intracapitalist rivalries, rather than persist in seeing ideological enemies where they do not exist. Here Obama comes into his own, albeit half-blind, struggling against historical currents, and preoccupied with antiradical culturally inherited intellectual baggage *still* defining the American political culture, eminently qualified to serve as the convenient spokesperson for American capitalism. His Pacific-first / pivot / rebalancing framework, primarily military in execution, with trade advantage secondary, is about *power*, carrying capitalism along with it, yet a framework imprisoned in an ideological mindset which treats capitalism as the means to an end, not an end in itself. For want of a label I see this as an authoritarianism wedded to and dependent on capitalism, but driven by anterior values rooted in and/or reflecting a *mélange* of discriminatory historical practices which have destroyed the meaning of human life.

Ineradicable moral wrongs have desensitized American capitalism into a primordial social force beyond the need to meet its internal requirements, whether one speaks of surplus value, the declining rate of profit, or the salience of underconsumption. I refer to the heritage of slavery, segregation, anti-Semitism, phobic reactions to socialism, radicalism, industrial unionism, a psychosocial center of ethnocentrism and xenophobia (vivified in historical outbreaks of red scares and lynch mobs) indicative of a whole slew of pathological hatreds borne of invidious class distinctions and rankings, all of which have been integrated into the societal belief-system in shaping economic and political as well as cultural values. (American historical-cultural development has been more a curse than a blessing when it comes to attitude-formation.) One comes a step closer to the mark: Authoritarianism trumps capitalism in the new dispensation, without modifying its principle features of structural-social hierarchy, differentials of wealth and power, consciously-wrought cruelty to the lower social strata, fear of democratization as the

working principle of social organization—hence, America under Democratic leadership in October 2013, Obama’s legacy—with yet more to come.

### **Varieties of Capitalism: The Enlightenment-Calculation**

This need not be; I confess to having sufficient non-Marxist elements in my thinking to see capitalism as a social system of waste and predation, not because of supposed internal contradictions, as cogent as that may be when presented in a wider historical-sociological context, but because of the repression exercised by ruling groups, who control multiple levers of power. Yet, American capitalism has lost its bearings, acting even against capitalism as a world system (its attitude toward other capitalist nations, notwithstanding international corrective mechanisms, as, conquer or be conquered), not to mention its scurrilous treatment of the Other, the catch-all socialism and social movements of change. This descent into irrationality, presently seen in Obama’s Far Eastern policy, but also projected globally, is that the system has incorporated its own *reification of power*. From the standpoint of enlightened capitalism, it has, quite literally, gone off the deep end. Though this process carries capitalism forward, it does two things harmful to itself and with whom it comes in contact, becoming morally and even economically bankrupt in the unreasoning drive for global supremacy, and thus power-hungry, it loses sight of the very internal composition and distribution of capital necessary to a balanced political economy, viz., the defense establishment sucking the lifeblood of commerce while simultaneously eroding the social safety net.

Enlightened capitalism remains capitalism, only more sensible, sophisticated, less war-prone, less given to volatile business-cycle swings, nonetheless, still expansive, exploitative, structurally impaired through the epistemological workings of commodity fetishism, the psychological workings of alienation, and the general impoverishment of culture created by the monetization of creativity itself. So, for me now to introduce Henry M. Paulsen Jr. as a fundamental corrective of Obama’s treatment of China, embodied in the latter’s Pacific-first strategy, but also, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, does not imply endorsement of the views of the former, merely, that here is an obviously skillful perhaps even intelligent capitalist who, rather than sulk in the memory-pool (cesspool?) of anticommunism, or move directly toward armed global hegemony, or pick a fight on any grounds that might offer—all three uncomfortably close to where Obama stands at the moment—enables one to see, first, that confrontation with China need not be inevitable, second, that full recognition of China’s capitalistic reality, and still greater potentiality, requires on the part of the US a very different geostrategic framework, and third, further recognition that the global structure no longer admits of unilateral supremacy and uses of power.

Paulsen is no friend of socialism, nor should one expect him to be—for, in that case, he wouldn’t be Paulsen. But in his NYT article, “China’s Economy, Back on Track,” Oct. 5, he knows and appreciates capitalism when he sees it, and he knows what to look for, as critical areas in the transformation from socialism to capitalism. With that technical grasp (we owe him that!) in mind, one could say that if Paulsen were listened to seriously, ignoring his past record as Treasury Secretary and leading role in the financial bailout, and rather, just in terms of textual discussion of the article and its possible validity, we would find a *logic* requiring or stipulating that sword-rattling cease, humanitarian interventionism come to a halt (already, directed to China, it would be knocking hopelessly at the wrong door, and hopefully, in vain everywhere else), and all the cant, flummery, and lies to keep the war engine turning cut short and finally abandoned, cast out of the

board rooms, yet hardly to be expected, the Situation Room of the White House. For Paulsen, such a process would obviously not be for the purpose of achieving the internal democratization of the American social structure and political economy, nor for renouncing the goals of market penetration and maximum profitability on the international playing field.

Nevertheless, though not his purpose, the analysis allows, objectively, for the argument that recognition of China's capitalist dimensions and potential for subsequent development in that direction obviates the need for further confrontation (the Pacific-first strategy) on America's part. In turn, this would mean the avoidance of the train wreck possibly looming between the two countries, and, within America, the collision between enlightened capitalism (were *that* attainable!) and a permanent state of war (the condition I had been describing with respect to the Obama-Brennan methodology of "hit-list" constant revisions in the campaign of drone assassination, in order to bind future administrations) that itself takes on attitudes of permanency with the provocative character of present interventionist policies and psychological as well as economic-monetary attachment to the huge stratospheric defense budget.

The second point, objectively, stemming from Paulsen's analysis, is that, given China's capitalist nature, the grounds for America's posture of confrontation therefore removed or diminished, the ideological *haze* within which US policy is conducted is thereby lifted, permitting if not the idea and practice of class struggle (which few really expect), then at least the fumigation or cleansing of the House of Order, i.e., a break in the clouds so that working people can gain a clarified view of exploitation and needless wars. Obama's passion for secrecy is highly relevant here. The haze which surrounds government (secrecy gives mystery to ideology in ways difficult to explain, enveloping it so as to magnify its importance) prevents the people's growth of political consciousness in forming independent judgments on his administration's record across the board, and not only in foreign policy. Surveillance works to serve the same end, the construction of ignorance of the populace.

Sweep out, then, the verbiage of the liberalization of war, which is pulling the rug from under serious dissent, and political consciousness can begin its slow progression upward. Clarity is the enemy of authoritarianism, even when capitalists unwitting bring clarity about through searching for efficiency and the supposed liberation of productive forces, which have nothing to do with workers' freedom and social democracy. Better a straightout capitalist than a White House charlatan of democracy, who, by chance, also appears to hunger for power. The latter, unlike the former, illumines the Great Paradox: To save capitalism (which he doesn't believe actually needs saving) and prevent its decline in America, Obama advocates for policies, focused on China, which could lead to the cataclysmic breakdown of the system both nations, coming from different historical starting points, now share. In this light, Paulsen is a breath of fresh air. (I never thought I would say this, but then again I never thought when I voted for Obama that he would turn out the way that he did—but I was quickly disabused.). He welcomes China to the club, rather than ring military forces around it, negotiate security alliances, conduct military joint-maneuvers, even, only days ago, arrange for the installation of drone bases and missile-defense systems

### **Pragmatical International Capitalism: Nonideological Coexistence in Harmony**

Paulsen is not put-off by the auspices, now somewhat of a formality in terms of nomenclature, under which capitalist changes are to be carried out: "Next month, President Xi Jinping and Prime



Minister Li Keqiang will use an important meeting—the so-called Third Plenum of the Communist Party’s 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress—to unveil China’s priorities for reforming economic policy for the next decade.” I like the details, no gnashing of teeth here. He anticipates criticism: “Yet because it will probably decide only general policies, leaving the specifics for later, some cynics have already begun to dismiss the reforms as too little, too timid and too late. They note that a decade ago, a previous generation of leaders failed to reduce the influence of state-owned enterprises and to complete the economic reforms of the 1990s.” One sees already, the reference to “state-owned enterprises,” code for a classic formulation of market fundamentalism (along the lines of Jeffrey Sachs with respect to Russia), *not* my cup of tea, Chinese or otherwise. Nor is Paulsen Cyrus Eaton of a previous generation, a businessman dealing with Russia on a more open basis of respect (there are too few businessmen of Eaton’s character, emancipated from all ideological hang-ups, and tolerant—as Paulsen ultimately is not—of genuinely mixed economies), and yet he stands clearly apart, still as an undoubted capitalist, from the Washington defense establishment. This, in light of Obama’s proneness to war, has to count for something.

To the naysayers who dismiss the “reforms” (again, think market fundamentalism), Paulson responds to the criticism: “But I believe the prospects for restructuring China’s economy—bolstering the role of the market, expanding opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, allocating capital more efficiently and improving the balance between consumption and investment—are better than at any point since the 1990s. At a time when global growth remains sluggish, *reinvigorating such reforms is more important than ever to the world economy.*” (Italics, mine) Not only does he neither fear China nor seek to put it down, but the italicized portion suggests quite the reverse: looking to China to pull up the remainder of the world economy, hence the indebtedness of international capitalism to its very success and survival. From a capitalist standpoint there are marked differences in the levels of sophistication that have been applied to China and Far Eastern policy, with Obama incapable of perceiving more than a narrow conception of US self-interest (already embodied in his National-Security State) and some of the earlier advisers surrounding Woodrow Wilson (to which I think Paulsen, here, would fit in) in which the theme of internationalism is regarded seriously and with hope, as preferable to traditional imperialist practices of resort to military means of enforcement of trade activities and the building of spheres of influence.

Paulsen waxes almost poetic on China’s capitalistic prospects. He writes, “There are four reasons for my optimism,” starting with the proposition, “China’s leaders clearly understand that their growth model needs to change,” to which he adds in explanation: “In speech after speech, Mr. Xi and Mr. Li have put their political capital on the line by promoting economic reform. They have drawn up blueprints and adopted pilot programs—like a free-trade zone in Shanghai—that will bolster the market and rationalize the allocation of capital, for instance by permitting more foreign competition and greater fluctuation of interest rates.” This reads like Econ 101, except that Paulsen is treating with a nation that Obama has in his cross-hairs. Under #1 he continues: “Other reforms, including liberalizing deposit rates, still need to be put in place, but an experiment to liberalize lending rates is a very positive step. So is Beijing’s signal that it might *open more sectors of its economy* to competition through a bilateral investment treaty with the United States.” (Italics, mine)

(Disclosure: I find disheartening the dismantlement of socialism now occurring, in varying degrees, on a global basis, as also in Vietnam and Cuba, which, because governments and Left

parties did not press forward hard enough for still greater socialism, may account for its weakness—to me, the betrayal of a great promise, provided socialist economies did not become dependent on enforced regimentation, e.g., the Cultural Revolution, and, in these societies at large, did not create police-state infringements on civil liberties. In this article, I am not an apologist for China, but I am equally quick to point out that capitalist nations and economies have proven more committed to war than have been Russia and China, whose experience on the receiving end of intervention have made them less expansive, more insular, and generally hostile to intervention in principle. Moreover, capitalist nations have not been immune to violations of civil-liberties and police-state tactics, have also shown cruelty to their peoples, and on social-welfare measures have often been hamstrung by ideological concerns. But not to lose sight of the analysis, I am suggesting that, comparatively, Obama, through the militarization of both liberalism *and* capitalism, is a greater menace to humankind and peace on the planet, because he practiced subterfuge on behalf of a monolithic corporate order, than China, or than the capitalism praised here by Paulsen.]

His second reason for optimism is that “China’s new leaders are strong enough to press for change,” a surprising twist given the usual association in capitalist thought of socialism and centralization (which is standard business code for economic dictatorship), to which Paulson demurs: “The history of Chinese economic reform suggests that vigorous central leadership is essential.” He cites chapter and verse: Deng “was the determined architect behind China’s initial reforms in 1978 and their reinvigoration in 1992,” and then Zhu, under Jiang Zemin, “pushed through reforms of the taxation system and state-controlled industries that paved the way for China’s joining the World Trade Organization in 2001.” He sees, however, in the subsequent decade, “reforms stalled” because of the “evaporation of political commitment in Beijing,” and now, “the new leaders have signaled that they are prepared to move,” to Xi’s credit—yes, Xi, opposed to Trans-Pacific and actively undermining Obama’s program at the recently concluded meetings on Bali. Paulson accords him respect: “An anti-corruption campaign begun by Mr. Xi demonstrates a willingness to take on even the most politically sensitive pillars of the state-led economy.” Not drone bases in Japan or the transfer of major naval “assets” to the Pacific would seem rational from the evidence known to all, but Obama persists in his quest for a showdown with China of some yet unspecified kind—provided the cannons are in place.

Paulson’s third reason for optimism practically gives away much of the shop. He admits that China’s rate of growth and all-around economic performance have been so commendable and salutary as to be *too much* so, necessitating recognition that they cannot continue, thereby introducing pressures for the consolidation of growth. China, in effect, is now one of us, facing similar problems, yet having escaped successfully the ’08 financial debacle (itself, if he contemplated the situation, should, given his intimate connection to the bailout, have made him doubly in awe of Chinese economic planning. Yet he misses the irony involved). Thus, he writes: “China no longer has the luxury to delay needed reforms. China’s economic output expanded nearly sixfold between 2002 and 2012, from \$1.5 trillion to \$8.3 trillion, but that growth fostered complacency. True, it weathered the financial crisis through giant spending on public works, but that only put off the day of reckoning.”

A *sixfold* increase in a single decade—yet success becomes the argument for putting on the brakes; curiously, he diagrams the experience of the New Deal, of public works and retrenchment, as though fearful a good thing might yield a qualitative leap—hence the day of reckoning, caution,

balance: “The presumption that China can simply grow its way out of any problems no longer holds.” Paulson does not question, as also did not FDR (witness the recession in 1937), whether the declining public sector was responsible here for the economic slowdown. Instead, he looks for market-reform as a substitute for public works to bring about recovery: “Growth is slowing, inequality has widened, provincial and local government debts have climbed. China’s export-oriented sectors face harsh headwinds, from sluggish consumer demand in advanced markets to rising labor costs at home.” He might as well, point-for-point, have been describing the US, including, on local government debts, the bankruptcy of Detroit. My point, he is unflappable about market-based solutions for these problems, as soon becomes clear.

Finally, the fourth reason for optimism is the caliber of leadership: “[P]ublic expectations for change are higher than ever. When the new leaders were appointed last year, they were compared favorably to their immediate predecessors”; yet the “honeymoon” for Xi and Li, who took over in November, “is over.” And because they “are being measured” against Jiang and Zhu, “the necessity for action is greater.” From this point, Paulsen goes into high gear about the virtues of the market, becoming the Jeffrey Sachs of the Far East (still however, while opposed to state planning, which he terms “official fiat,” there is no touch of hostility): “Momentum is building for reforms that would introduce market prices for oil, gas and other natural resources so that prices better reflect supply and demand, rather than official fiat.” The following is market fundamentalism in microcosm: “Distorted pricing has been one cause of China’s energy inefficiency and environmental degradation. Like the new steps toward liberalizing energy prices, Shanghai’s new free-trade zone is another positive indicator.”

Paulsen wants the whole enchilada: “More is needed—broader access to capital, greater investment options and protections from the risk of haphazard capital flows—if Shanghai is to become a global financial center.” What is striking is that he implies China can do this on its own, no mention being made of assistance from the US or the IMF and World Bank, and in his passing remark on “protections from the risk of haphazard capital flows,” he is, perhaps unaware, bring the role of government back on a key matter. He continues the prescriptive account: “A new round of fiscal reforms is likely, leading to more rational allocation of resources between the central and local governments [again, crediting the role of government], which are struggling to rebuild weakened rural pension and health care systems and manage the largest urbanization in a sustainable way, while paying for unfunded mandates from Beijing and maintaining job growth.” Despite the market-emphasis, he identifies problems facing capitalist and socialist economies alike, as in the rational allocation of resources and weakened rural pension and health care systems, but it is his allusion to managing the largest urbanization—perhaps the greatest societal challenge anywhere in the world—that, by his recognizing, now earns my respect. He does not underestimate the Chinese achievements, which makes his Times article a useful source in opposing the demonization of China and putative need to isolate and contain it.

Paulsen constructs neither red lines nor timetables: “This vast array of specific reforms can’t be achieved at a stroke, and certainly not at a single party gathering. But the decisions likely to be taken in November will set China’s economy in a positive—and lasting—new direction.” Most arresting is not his “optimism,” but the confidence he places in China itself. If one were to pin him to the wall, he might agree with my interpretation of the broader framework. China is an ascending power, the US a declining one, which helps explain the extreme steps taken by the latter to arrest its

decline: trade pacts to which are insinuated the threads of militarism, intervention on a global basis, assassination, complemented by a massive program of surveillance internally. Paulsen may well have sensed as much in his closing sentence, in which he acknowledges the *reverse* situation than is commonly supposed. The West, America as its leader, is no longer absolutely dominant in world politics and economics; at the very least, a condition of mutual dependence exists, and, between the lines, one reads that China is looked to for pulling up and saving from disaster the others. Of course, gratitude cannot be expected. Nietzsche long ago diagnosed the problem, in the form of the psychodynamics of the bully, one whose inner fears make him aggressive, spiteful, vindictive, principal characteristics—although he does not say this—for election to the American presidency. Paulsen closes: “Advanced economies, like the United States and the European Union, depend on it [China’s economy in a positive—and lasting—new direction] as much as China does.”

OCTOBER 14, 2013

### **Sticking It to the (Class) Enemy**

Poor Tea Partiers, assigned the blame for all that has gone and is going wrong in liberal America. What of liberal America itself? Blameless, besieged by intransigent nutcakes, or rather, indistinguishable from those identified with Reaction, holding up the latter for ridicule in order to certify a mythic Centrism for the nation as a whole and pretend to humanitarian credentials, themselves vitiated by hiding behind the term while conducting interventions and hegemonic movements in the best tradition of power-politics?

If the Tea Party is the Far Right, I propose a new political typology, with most of the rest of the country, Republicans and Democrats alike, members of the *Mocha Party*, i.e., an enriched brew more insidious for its seeming sophistication—from tricolor hats, now to business suits and warm-up jackets, but with the same commitment to militarism, corporatism, an underlying paranoia directed to what has already been thrown over the ideological cliff, socialism, universal health care, full employment, equalitarianism as the national ideal, as though somehow the realization of any or all of these would destroy America. And unfortunately, that may be right, for American capitalism has wholly filled out and corrupted the ideological universe in which we, as Americans, live, the air we breathe, the goals we choose—or for that matter, Obama’s favorite boastful cliché to silence all criticism (though to opposite effect): that’s *who we are* as Americans. Who we are, from the vaporization of human beings through the targeted assassination of drone warfare to the willing submission as a people to the bludgeoning of civil liberties through massive surveillance into our personal lives.

Liberal America has been and remains a fig leaf to cover international predation under the banner of market freedom, and the structural impoverishment and imposed sense of inferiority of one-third of the nation, in both cases, silently accepted as though sanctioned by divine law. We have become spectators at our own funeral, a winding procession the hearses piled up, patiently waiting their cue to move out *through the White House gates* past the foreclosed properties, gated communities, splendiferous banks, deteriorating infrastructure, a mishmash of wealth and poverty held together by the bonds of hatred for all things which bring into question our own superior moral virtue. Psychologists might say, this is at bottom self-hatred, projected onto an enemy, but we know better, our military strength the means of overcoming doubt, the certification of power, grandeur,

exceptionalism—so why abandon the moral high ground, however gained, which has worked so well for the risks of peace, social justice, respect for the international community, which can only lead to the diminution of America's global standing?

Mocha Partiers, occupying the seven-tenths of the political-ideological spectrum, the remainder divided (15% each) between Tea Partiers, thirsting for further recruits, and the Left, desperately seeking to carve out autonomous space, weakened from within through vacillation, and from without, by the presumed attraction of a Democratic party corrupt from head to toe and skillful in dressing betrayed promises into a liberal/progressive fetishism coasting on practiced deception and portraying the Right as outside what has become the *mainstream*. W.E.B. DuBois spoke of the Talented Tenth. Radicals are our generation's Talented Fifteenth, facing like Sisyphus an uphill struggle, not only to organize effectively but also gain purchase ideologically in a social system where obfuscation rules and clarity of vision is dismissed as traitorous conduct or prosecuted as communistic. The undertakers are busy at work.

Surveillance has a bipartisan history (itself confirming the Mocha span on the spectrum), but intensified greatly under Obama, whose respect for civil liberties extends only so far as not allowing for the use of armed drones to assassinate Americans in this country (overseas, another story). Guantanamo spans the parties. Whistleblowers in disrepute spans the parties, although here Bush II and his predecessors are novices when it comes to Espionage Act prosecutions, compared to Obama. Executive power, ditto. Enlarging the role of the CIA, particularly its operational capacity and mission—ditto. Obama is Bush III, with the role of Cheney multiplied tenfold. Nuclear modernization (improved lethality) continues apace. The transfer of battleships, submarines, and aircraft carriers with *their* battle groups—all as part of the geostrategic rebalancing of US military forces—to the Pacific theater, not merely ditto, but the departure from previous administrations. Military bases, long-range aircraft nuclear-capable, alliance treaties and joint maneuvers, verily the Democrats preempt the field of foreign-policy superpatriotism. Strangely, one hears little of Tea Party foreign policy, as though it is difficult to surpass Obama's interventionism.

Class struggle evaporates in the assurance of global hegemony, and *yet*, as American power recedes in the real world of multiple power-centers, one would have thought the magic spell of Exceptionalism would become diminished and people would come to recognize the essential irrationality of their lives as a first step toward fundamental social change. Not a chance! The more difficult the management of US hegemony, the more assertive America becomes, both at home and abroad, to keep itself on top. And finally, much of the remainder of the world has had enough. Putin checks the bombing of Syria. Britain has second thoughts about the Middle East. The president of Brazil cancels a state visit to the United States. Even Iran appears to be winning over world opinion against the US embargo policy and “all-options-on-the-table” threats of attack. With fewer cards to play, Obama is still less to be trusted.

Where will it all end? Mocha Partiers will soon probably absorb their Tea Party excrescence into a viable right-wing expression, aka, authoritarianism, and thereby push radicalism, if not to the breaking point, than at least into increased symbolic acts which the State can easily control. Capitalism, in the process, will become all-penetrative, filling consciousness with subservience and displacing the very concept of *class* to the junk heap of history: the citizen qua soldier of industry. Pavlovian, acting on cue, to vote, consume, if necessary, fight, in the name of Washington, Lincoln, and the Holy Dollar. The assault on class is heightened as its relevance declines—rather than the

opposite—because authoritarianism feeds on weakness, crushing those below, and then despising them to cover over the arbitrary acts of cruelty. Do I exaggerate? The charade of ideological difference currently being played out in Washington limits participation to Tea-Mocha Partiers, not a radical to be found *nor* a legislative context and its supporters having anything to do with the social welfare.

With each supposed battle in Congress, the structure and contours of a social safety net shrink further, leaving citizenship an empty promise insofar as democratic governance ought to confer an obligation on government to provide, as a minimum, for FDR's freedom from want and fear, and, because the society has such greater resources to marshal than in the New Deal, a level of decency of housing, employment, and rock-bottom respect for the privacy and integrity of the individual, than certainly obtains at present. Measured by its objective potentiality, American society is a dismal failure. No one in the inclusive 85% mentions the military, except to expand and cheer it on. That omission unites Democrats, Republicans, and Tea Party activists, members of the latter, whom, all in common, wear ideological blinders so as not to criticize military spending and the growing internal class differentiation in wealth and power, at home, or, overseas, the looming confrontation with China, the restrictive (on Asia) provisions of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, the global necklace of military bases—economy in government, translating as lowering corporate taxes while extracting benefits from out of the hide of those who can least afford it.

Sticking it to the (class) enemy simply means, then, mobilizing the repressive societal mechanisms—the “it” in the formulation—to the working class and *below*, as the internal structural-cultural-ideological steamroller to ensure their political neutralization and economic condition of impoverishment, of vital importance because the bottom strata must be regarded *as the enemy* (as in class enemy) if society is to function properly under capitalism, more specifically, American capitalism, which must not permit its hierarchical structure (a pyramidal system of power) or political culture (approval of wealth inequality, and internalization of failure, for those who do not attain it) to meet with opposition within or outside of the political process. As America moves into its phase of political-economic decline on the global stage, its hegemonic formula of external expansion-internal regimentation becomes more meaningful for the bipartisan political leadership—and to which the American people will become increasingly habituated.

OCTOBER 16, 2013

### **Starve the (Military) Beast**

The *New York Times*, in an editorial, “False Equality in Michigan,” Oct. 14, correctly noted the abuse of ballot initiatives, in this case the passage of an amendment to the state constitution banning race-conscious college admissions policies (here arising from U. of M. Law School case), even though in violation of a US Supreme Court ruling sanctioning such policies, therefore bringing the issue once again before the Court. This compelled me to rethink the question of affirmative action, not on such legal grounds as the position's validation via the equal protection clause, but in terms of the limitations imposed on *social policy* by a society increasingly authoritarian and militaristic in its political-historical development and cultural values. The context: despite gains earned through the civil-rights struggle and a numerically significant antiwar movement (both given ample justification by the persistence of racism, on one hand, and consecutive interventions and a global

counterrevolutionary posture, on the other), efforts toward structural democratization have a) fallen short of achievement, b) been checked by a systemic core of corporate power, and c) reflect a half-century and more (starting with post-World War II McCarthyite anticommunism and the purging of dissent, and continuing through successive pressures toward conformity and consumerism) of a Rightward shift of the political-ideological spectrum in which Centrism itself has objectively moved several notches to the Right. This is essential to an understanding of Affirmative Action, and equally, the wall of opposition to it.

In such straitened circumstances, democracy is stifled, gasping for air, with the result that any positive gain is magnified out of all proportion, pronounced “radical” simply for having succeeded or even gotten off the ground. So with affirmative action. It appears terribly advanced (to *both* sides) for a society used to relegating race to the margins of public policy—proponents satisfied that a bold step had been taken, opponents, in typical psychological falling-domino mindset, fearful of the end of (white) civilization as they know it. Stepping back, one sees that both are wrong, that, in fact, affirmative action is a band-aid, a “solution” to racial inequality and discrimination entirely within the framework of the status quo. For what it does at the outset, as though done with foresight (although I reject conspiracy-theories of all kinds and chalk this up to a common awareness of outcomes), is give minimal ground to racial minorities in the hope of channeling them into safe institutional pathways and thereby keep the *social peace*. The result appears, even to radicals, salutary, and given the opposition, as witness the Michigan amendment and contemplation of similar action in other states, it *is*. But it is not good enough, and, if anything, blinds one to the necessity for further action pointing in the direction of genuine societal transformation (not the Obama ballyhoo and slogan-mongering about change and transformation—outright deception in the service of ruling groups).

The Times editorial made me realize, because of its sincere liberalism and well-intentionality, precisely how inadequate such a position, mine included, has always been: a battlefield which resolutely remains on the surface, permitting society in all essential things—including hierarchy, class-differentiations in income, wealth, and power, a gigantic war machine and military ethos, abject failure to confront major problems from job creation to climate change—to stay unchanged. The nub of the matter is this: Unless there is structural democratization of the social order, such that society’s resources are directed to the security, well-being, and education of every individual, and most important, the child, then affirmative action is hollow because it leaves the myriad inequalities and degradations of society otherwise intact. This raises a further question—the nature of American society, and inevitably, the social priorities inherent in capitalism, nominally a political economy, but in reality inseparable from America itself.

America lacks nationhood. It is composed of corporate satrapies moving ever further toward a unified, consolidated ruling class, a cohesiveness of power, impregnated with military aspiration and purpose, that rejects *equality* as the root-condition to be satisfied in any meaningful conception of democracy, equality qua the inherent dignity of every human being. Period. No fudging, no outs. Instead, what we find is the tremendous misallocation of America’s resources, to the detriment of its potentialities as a humane society, and the deprivation of life’s opportunities to a large proportion of its citizens (which, through curtailing their growth, and the subsequent enrichment to be shared, denies full growth to the privileged as well). Why? Wherefore? Only an hegemonic compulsive-obsessive framework, rejecting the moral-social obligations of government to its

people, would encourage, require, and mandate the sacrifice of whole segments of its population—hence, the absence of true nationhood—on the altar of militarism.

There is no reason, given America's wealth, that every school in the nation should not have the support necessary to ensure every pupil at every level the learning experience to qualify for and receive a college education. No, the results would not be identical; not everyone is an Einstein. Not everyone has the same inclinations and aptitudes to, say, be a history professor at Harvard or Yale (Heaven forbid!). But at least he and she will have the advantage, with society an enormous cheering section at each child's back, to form and develop an individual identity, as opposed to now, where military recruiters hover over high-school graduating classes waiting to pounce. That, of course, is the least of the military's sins and those who act as enablers—POTUS, Congress, the business and banking communities, etc. Thus, if America were instilled with the spirit and reality of nationhood, none would be marginalized as a "bad" investment in the future, none called to do battle for General Electric or Boeing or JP Morgan Chase, *all* treated as worthy of attention and respect, so that every applicant for college admissions, enjoying the same starting point by virtue of society's prioritizing its *raison d'être* to be, not global superpower #1, but the elevation of each individual to *citoyen* #1, with every right society has it within its powers to bestow, then perhaps affirmative action would go the way of the dodo.

Can capitalism afford to invite full human emancipation through the reduction of the military to an absolute minimum? I think the answer is plain. Even when war, intervention, forcible trade-and-investment penetration and ideological influence are not necessary to domestic and global profit-maximization, the military establishment is the excellent conduit for siphoning off the national wealth so that the US does not have to have, among its many other current deficiencies, from the deterioration of infrastructure to the stagnation of wages and income among the bottom-half of the population, the means of educating each pupil to the highest standards possible. In that light, affirmative action is the trickle-down paradigm of giving an inch rather than building a democratic society at its foundations.

My *New York Times* Comment to the aforementioned editorial follows (Oct. 14):

"...race-conscious admission policies may further a compelling governmental interest in educational diversity." Emphatically Yes. But something more has to be said. Affirmative action lets government off the hook by ensuring a universalization of admissions, while not fulfilling its societal obligation of constructing, financing, staffing, promoting an educational system in which disparities of educational achievement no longer exist. Hence, true equality, from the standpoint of education, at the foundation of American society.

This would require the bold commitment to authenticating the value of diversity in ways never achieved or even seen. Perhaps the New Deal style of approach: a national commitment to educational excellence for all, as opposed to the underfinancing of ghettoized schools. By New Deal I mean, not be fearful of cries of socialism when addressing the general welfare. But I also would take the further step: Recognize how the military budget is eating out the vitals of American society. Not guns vs. butter, but global hegemony vs. the stunting of American youth.

Our social priorities are way out of joint. It is heartbreaking to see youngsters knowing their dreams of self-fulfillment, a decent career, family security, may never open because of the structural-cultural valuing of sheer power and wealth over human betterment. If I were in that



position, forehead pressed to the window, I know I'd be resentful. Beyond the social peace—justice to all.

OCTOBER 18, 2013

### **Psychodynamics of US Default**

The battle is (temporarily) over. The nation, organized in its corporate-military, hierarchical structure, *won*; the people, as far as ever from the democratization of the social structure, *lost*. Nothing has in fact changed from the standpoint of fundamental public policy. The US militaristic-interventionist posture in the world emerges unscathed, indeed, not even mentioned by either party in the congressional debates, although largely responsible for the financial difficulties. America bathes in a sea of false consciousness, still thinking itself above criticism for international criminal behavior—in this case, beyond intervention, beyond targeted assassination, beyond Third World counterrevolution (all wrapped in the protective cloak of the current rationale for hegemonic maintenance, counterterrorism), instead relating now to having endangered the global economic system and consequent human suffering of literally millions, for no other reason than finding ways to *preserve its military establishment* while still being able to pay its bills, chiefly in that quarter.

Self-congratulation is the order of the day, from POTUS on down, as though postponement of the in-house resolution of pending emergencies—shutdown, default—had addressed, or even was intended to address, deeper foundational issues of American democracy (?), such as surveillance on a massive scale, the geostrategic framework of Far Eastern political-ideological-economic penetration (viz., confrontation with China), bipartisan reinforcement of weakening the bargaining strength of labor and preventing the spoliation of the environment. In sum, the crisis momentarily resolved merely makes possible business as usual, which means, capitalism unimpeded while unemployment and the continued growth, amidst wealth concentration perhaps hitherto unseen, of an undeclared underclass, form the background of the mock debate in Washington.

To Congress, it is not *mock*, however, but a life-and-death struggle over principle, in which principle has been so cheapened as to reveal the utter moral bankruptcy, bordering on political imbecility as well, of all those involved—and a befogged public, detached from the skewed priorities of a nation shoveling money into war-making, directly at the expense of a meaningful social safety net, merely acquiesce. Nothing, it seems clear, has been learned by the recent fracas. Republicans, nursing their wounds, ready to strike again, Democrats, preparing to parry the thrust, self-righteously rallying around Obama and the troops, the whole a tableau of solipsistic America showing contempt for everything outside of itself (yes, even so-called “friends and allies”), social cruelty to everything within, except, naturally, the privileged, presumably superior, among us, frequently organized by categories (business, finance, military leaders) to ensure an inclusive elite, rather than mere individual rankings, which might invite social criticism.

We know which side our bread is buttered on, so that even the more slow-witted Republicans steer clear, in their presumed drive for economy in government, from reducing the weight and influence of the Vested Interests. Budget battles, whichever “side” wins, both so Janus-faced as to be comfortable bedfellows, the main contours of domestic and foreign policy continue, foremost, militarized internationalism and a continued financialization of capitalism shaping a domestic

economy and polity in which stratification of classes ever widens—in true Biblical fashion, the poor be ever with us.

These political skirmishes are diversions plain and simple from the recognition of what lies just beyond our noses: the Class-State, groomed, for popular approval, as the National-Security State (for which patriotism forms a compulsive obligation), itself, I find deeply regrettable to say, the façade for an encroaching, distinctively American, in ideology, but not in structure, form of rudimentary (i.e., still imperfectly developed) fascism, the ideology, giving the US the benefit of the doubt about uniqueness, because of the doctrine of Exceptionalism, yet structurally, not unlike the preliminary features of the organization of business in 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Together, the unique and the generic blend well. In America, Exceptionalism drives forward structural monopolization, consolidation, supra-organization in trade associations, all recognizable elements in the unification of the business system (for its own sake, but also as flooring for a strong military), which, absent Exceptionalism, but perhaps not dissimilar ideological formulas, one finds its counterpart in Germany, business, sector-by-sector, organized in “fronts,” while in Italy and Japan, corporatism possibly more cleanly defined and executed.

Psychodynamics of default refers, then, to an obliviousness of harming others, a single-minded pressing forward, totally absorbed, self-defined as *conquest*, in the search for dominance—default representing a fulcrum by which to keep America and the world on a tether, always mindful and appreciative of the virtues of American capitalism and the prowess of its military. Without America, where would the world be? By contrast, all negotiations failing, why cry over human suffering here and abroad? E.g., let the unemployed of Europe—ungrateful to America to begin with—learn to play by the rules of IMF-World Bank austerity recommendations.

The moral abyss that I refer to—here, not the callousness of turning away from the consequences of US financial decisions, but the absolute desensitization toward what has been left out: a nonnegotiable military presence which permeates consciousness, policy-making, the nation’s very identity, in disregard of all that is, or rather, *could be*, the moral obligation of government to its people and the world beyond.

My *New York Times* Comment on Damien Cave’s insightful article, “Viewing U.S. in Fear and Dismay” (Oct. 16), on world opinion on the eve of decision on default—mine, same date:

Shutdown, default, both lead to exposure: America’s military-obsession has drained the coffers, revealing ugly priorities of hegemony at all costs—to itself and the rest of the world. We deserve global opprobrium, the world still reeling from a largely US-created ’07 financial crisis. Why single out Tea Partiers, when both parties promote the twin evils of our time, war and deregulation, themselves interrelated symptoms of structural-political decline?

Repair the US image abroad? We’re beyond that. The world knows armed drones for targeted assassination. The world knows intervention. The world knows the pivot, the rebalance of military forces in dangerous provocation to isolate and contain China. How can you repair failure of statesmanship? How repair what, from the article, people recognize self-indulgence, an exceptionalism rotting in the chaos of simple greed. The man/woman on the street in Greece or Mexico knows what we in America refuse to see: the US runs amuck at home and abroad, at home, with massive surveillance (how square that with democracy?) and abroad, e.g., Trans-Pacific Partnership to impose our will on an entire region.

Democrats may derive satisfaction from Tea-Party irrationality, but are they and Obama any better? Since the end of World War II we’ve been a morally callous, demanding our own way, always on a bipartisan basis, with

Democrats, like Clinton, indistinguishable from the two Bushs and Reagan before. Ah, the debacle—no way out.

OCTOBER 21, 2013

### **Functional Aspects of Dysfunction**

“Kicking the can down the road” is an overused, much abused description—along with “stalemate,” etc.—of the current US political scene, as though a blistering ideological conflict has taken place and will continue (with Obama and the Democrats the saviors of the American polity), when in reality, all sides are lurching downward in basic agreement that the military establishment, and its promise for maintaining global hegemony, shall remain entirely *intact*, and the structure of wealth and power ditto, while working people and the poor—in the throes of further degradation and loss of status—submit to their increased immiserization.

What kicking the can accomplishes is the concerted postponement of legislation promoting the public welfare, even more, massive obfuscation resulting in preservation of the status quo. “Compromise” is in the air, not as the reconciliation of the presumed extremes, but as a cover by which *both* sides can diminish the ideas and programs which are associated with advanced industrial democracies, a truly vibrant and effective social safety net. A first-world nation grafted onto a Third World mental-set, government wholly disconnected from the needs and aspirations of the people.

The more smoke, the more compromise. We’ve not seen anything quite like this before, even, or especially, in the time of McCarthyism, when large portions of the American people at least retained the wit to oppose (regrettably more internally in their minds than through actual protest) totalitarian means of achieving social control *and* the labor movement was not cowed into patriotic submission. This is a bleak period, one in which even so-called Obamacare looks good, despite its numerous concessions to Vested Interests and the raising obstacles to a single-payer system.

Amid the circus of deficit-reduction discussions, American foreign policy wends its merry way (so much so that even domestic critics of Obama have more-or-less ignored this area and the way counterterrorism has evolved into—if not initiated as—a long-term effort at hegemony-maintenance of counterrevolution. US troops are everywhere, as military planning takes on greater ambitions, most notably, of course, in the Pacific, but without foregoing “national-security interests” in the Middle East. Next stop, Africa and Latin America, all on the watch and with the blessing of Obama.

When I say dysfunction is functional I mean, not a conspiracy-theory explanation of what is termed the “impasse,” but an historical-developmental pattern in which class-differential in income, wealth, power, and prestige has been taking place since the close of World War II, perfectly predictable and consistent in line with retaining the position of unilateral world leader in every realm necessary to the expansion of US capitalism and meeting challenges posed by socialism and decolonialism to capitalism as the reigning international system. Keeping the lid on authentically progressive—i.e., democratizing—trends at home appeared necessary to mounting an aggressive policy of intervention and market-penetration globally.

The economic surplus was never permitted to yield a social-welfare benefit, one diminishing objective class differences and all that would mean raising the bottom-half of US society into a

meaningful role in American political-economic life. The choice was always *opposite*, visibly, e.g., Taft-Hartley, invisibly, if you will, the multiple cues of self-debasement and distraction, perhaps starting with the new glorification of wealth via enticing consumerism (the Gilded Age renewed) and entrepreneurial wisdom, which engendered admiration of the powerful and proper deference to their wishes, and, on foreign policy, a no-questions-asked attitude, as the goodies and thrills are empathetically passed along as the result of national honor and manly conquest. The greatest hoax since P.T. Barnum, as the wealth of these actions was siphoned off to the coffers of vast wealth, from defense industries to international finance.

Here we are, then, awaiting the next Washington –Go-Round, as wages stagnate, unemployment remains steady or increases, targeted assassination continues, surveillance increases its smothering effect on the American people’s thoughts and actions, so, Welcome to the Disney Land of Authoritarian Premises, in both meanings, a proposition antecedently supposed (Exceptionalism / Hegemony), and a specific locale (today, the USA, tomorrow, the ..... courtesy Brecht’s *Arturo Ui*).

My *New York Times* Comment (Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>) on editorial, “High Cost of Low Politics,” same date:

Within the current political dialogue, a constructive voice: criticism of brinkmanship, call for higher taxes on the extremely wealthy, and emphasis on job creation. What is NOT discussed are two signal failures of the Obama administration: the very high “defense” budget, itself a reflection of an interventionist foreign policy and a geostrategic framework vis-a-vis China (the rebalancing of military assets); and a domestic policy from Day One that refused to address job creation itself, as well as major policy areas (deregulation and a compromised health care plan) which undermined an attack on underconsumption.

We are witnessing the devolution of the American economy and society alike on the altar of policies intended for wealth concentration at home and still-hegemonic ambitions abroad, in a world of newly emerging multiple power centers wherein the US has to get used to more moderate and modest positioning, lest it witness a rapidly declining status.

Yes, Obama’s predecessors got the ball rolling, but—despite his liberal/progressive groupies, BLIND to his record—he has continued, and even accelerated policies and programs detrimental to the well-being of the average American. We look for scapegoats—Tea Partiers, Republicans in general—when the real analysis must focus both on Democratic complicity and the narrowness of the ideological spectrum. And so we gear up for the next round of brinkmanship—not over essentials (i.e., the military) but further cosmetics.

OCTOBER 22, 2013

### **Blood Money**

Blood money is money obtained at the cost of another’s life. Webster’s Collegiate is not known for Left-inspired definitions, yet even to include the entry is tacit recognition the practice is widespread. Let’s add, however, it is also (using that strict definition, “at the cost of another’s life”) *institutionalized* by the modern US banking system, if not indeed capitalism per se—the transfer of wealth from working people and the bottom strata of society steadily upward through the class system, until much that has been generated finds its way to the top. The result may not always be

“at the cost of another’s life,” but stagnant wages, widespread unemployment, foreclosure, malnutrition, and yes, despair, on the *societal* and not just individual level, for fully one-half the population. If we were being frank, we would term this process legitimated violence, having, by and large, the sanction of authority, ideology, the law, and, in the case at hand, liberalism, the Department of Justice, the Obama administration. Some unreconstructed radicals might be churlish enough to call it, class warfare, what upper groups, heavily sanctioned by all that society holds dear, practice on those below. More modestly, I’ll call it, economic violence, as practiced by a business civilization, largely unrestrained (and then, only restrained for its own good) in its operations.

Since at least the 1960s, as American capitalism became more internationalized (the precedent for this in its gradual development going back a century before, and already turning the corner by World War I), we see a qualitative change in its internal composition, the slow evaporation of the domestic industrial base, fueled by the movement of manufacturing in a bottom-fishing search to the cheapest labor costs, to what is now clearly the *financialization* of US capitalism. With that forward edge, a re-contouring of the political economy, several points are evident (I name only a few): within banking, a higher degree of concentration; within that, a single giant; that achieved, a closer relationship created between *the* bank, speaking foremost for itself, but also the financial sector in general, and, yes, government, a sweetheart-relationship (Masao Muryama, describing parallel dynamics for Japanese business consolidation, called it the “close-embrace” system); and the foreign-policy repercussions and necessities to make it work, i.e., a determinative voice or role in the economies of all other, or as many as possible, countries. The operable word in an American-dominated global economy in the ’08 financial crisis is *contagion*. US exotic financial instruments caused and still causes incalculable damage insinuated into banking systems worldwide, pension-fund investments, life-savings of people now devastated, yielding such outcomes as austerity measures ripping holes in previously sturdy social safety nets and expenditures on health and education.

To understand the proposed \$13B settlement between JPMorgan Chase and the US Government it is useful first to describe the American regulatory framework, of which this “deal” represents a perfect example. America has never had, not unexpectedly, a system of business regulation, if by that one means government, here chiefly federal, acting in the public interest, adversarial in posture, freed from collusive influences, amply staffed with, and mandated to utilize, investigative powers, administratively supported, and having The Law at its back—not unexpectedly, given the evolution of American capitalism as in fact *puristic* in its institutional formation and growth and in its ideological content and influence. As uncomplicated a capitalism, as compared, e.g., with nations possessing a feudal past (and for that reason carrying the potential of a socialist future), as one can imagine, running roughshod over antithetical values and practices. Regulation did not mean regulation, but rather the shield government threw around business both to protect it from the public *and* to promote internal monopolization sector by sector, therefore protection from internal competition. Theodore Roosevelt’s trust-busting is quite possibly the biggest scam in US historiography, the record pointing directly the other way and serving as excellent introduction to today’s Morgan-DOJ folderol. At least this can be said for TR, unlike Obama; he may have imbibed capitalism with his mother’s milk, but he did not worship it for its own sake—actually maybe worse than that. Roosevelt had a well-thought out if not completely articulated framework, in which he wanted a strong economic base, predicated, for him, on the consolidation and monopolization of the business system, because that would provide the best foundation for projecting military power in

the world arena. Capitalism, naturally, but power not only to implement the goals of capitalism, but as an independent consideration beyond markets to prestige as such. Obama worships at both shrines, capitalism and power, yet lacks TR's candor about each, and, failing to possess the same integrative powers of mind, melds the two in a knee-jerk militarism known by its global paramilitary operations and program of armed drones for targeted assassination. The difference is subtle, but real: TR is the partner, on an equal plane, with business, Obama, if not the servant of power, than so predisposed to business as to be readily manipulated, as witness his intensification of Clinton deregulation and partiality to every aspect of corporate wish-lists, whether oil drilling, Big Pharma profit-taking, climate-change avoidance, maintenance of unemployment rates, or now, Pacific trade agreements, further destroying regulation as affecting US interests.

Gabriel Kolko made the analytical breakthrough on the interpenetration of business and government, in his book *Triumph of Conservatism*, which demonstrates the system of *détentes*, blessed by Roosevelt, between the Bureau of Corporations and the House of Morgan, a pattern which served to define later the Federal Reserve System in the warm relationship between government regulators and bankers. No camouflage was necessary—the rule of thumb being, gentlemen talking to gentlemen, or, TR to Morgan, one or the other speaking, If I'm wrong, convince me of that, no prosecutions, penalties, opprobrium. In TR's day the revolving-door principle was not named; it didn't have to be, for Morgan men staffed the Bureau. In this respect, Obama's appointees, practically to a person, in Treasury, SEC, Interior, up and down the line, acceptable to the interests allegedly and ostensibly to be regulated. And now we have DOJ—Attorney General Holder, like Philander Knox in Roosevelt's day, experienced in and sympathetic to business—open to Jamie Dimon's stall tactics and circuitous negotiations, in which the principals held five private telephone conversations to reach this point, itself dressed up as a major victory for the public interest.

Dimon's celebration of the progress being made, described by Ben Protess and Jessica Silver-Greenberg in their excellent *New York Times* article, "U.S. Deal With JPMorgan Followed a Crucial Call" (October 21), is enough to warm the cockles of the hardest heart: "At a museum ['the Museum of the City of New York, a mansion with a marble staircase and French doors'] on Fifth Avenue, in a sparkling reception hall overlooking Central Park, Jamie Dimon convened his top executives and their spouses *last month* for the Wall Street equivalent of a pep rally." (Italics, mine) Last month: already confident both in the scope of the settlement and the security of his own position. Let the celebration go on; Fitzgerald was right, *they* are different from the rest of us. Dimon: "I'm proud of the company. We'll get through all of this"—the this being, peddling toxic mortgage investments and, the reporters note, "the regulatory and legal woes dogging the nation's biggest bank." The peddling in 2007 was not vaguely related to the financial crisis the following year. It was central, particularly having acquired Bear Stearns and Washington Mutual and *their* respective loads of manure. A pile now of Everest-proportions.

So then the minuet, Dimon on 24 September calls a Holder lieutenant—to all and sundry an amazing act of statesmanship because Wall Street CEO's don't deign to call, they are called by, Washington—perfectly timed to cancel a news conference in which DOJ was to announce a *civil*, not a criminal, suit against the bank. More negotiations: \$1B then \$3B—not enough said the government "to settle [in the reporters' words] an array of state and federal investigations into the bank's sale of troubled mortgage securities before the financial crisis." As one views the details, it

seems that Holder needed something to show for the government's prestige, a slap on the wrist JPMorgan Chase could easily absorb, and not such a paltry sum. Dimon then comes down to Washington to meet with Holder and raises the offer to \$11B (one wonders here why the government did not independently calculate the damage done, vastly more than the \$13B finally agreed on—and with it, *criminal* prosecution, but the answer, by the logic of interpenetration, is self-evident), afterward “talking five times in the last two weeks,” striking a deal on Friday (Oct. 18) and with no promises on heading off “an investigation from prosecutors in California, who were scrutinizing the bank's mortgage securities.” Protess and Silver-Greenberg did write an excellent factual article, but their judgment, possibly reflecting the NYT ambience, is wide of the mark: “For JPMorgan, once known as Washington's favorite bank, the deal would be *a stunning reversal of fortune*.” [Italics mine.]

How so? The choreographing, near as I can make out, was flawless. For example, some of what awaits Dimon, as they recount, seems formidable, but without USG actively pressing, and by the settlement, giving JPMorgan a certificate of good conduct so to speak, these cases will probably not get far, and if they do, will not bankrupt the firm—or if conceivably it creates a pain-in-the-side government subsidies to its star performer will be forthcoming. Everyone wants to investigate, several federal agencies and state regulators, two foreign countries, and, in addition, [t]he multifront campaign includes everything from a \$6 billion trading loss in London last year to the hiring of well-connected employees in China.” It appears the firm, with a finger in every catastrophic hole, is getting off lightly, especially, the reporters point out, when the “politically charged issue at the center of the financial crisis: the mortgage bubble” is considered. One further point—thus far, no admission of guilt; as the reporters laconically observe: “Banks are typically loath to acknowledge wrongdoing, fearing it could expose them to shareholder lawsuits.” Also thus far, no comment from either JPMorgan or Justice. (Incidentally, much of the \$13B would go to settle the suit brought by the Federal Housing Finance Agency because of the loans Morgan and Bear Stearns sold to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—chutzpah of the first water in cheating the government, never mind private investors.)

As for the possible criminal case, Protess and Silver-Greenberg capture the thinking well: “It was not until Friday [Oct. 18] that JPMorgan backed down from its demand that the criminal case go away. Rather than resolve the case now, JPMorgan decided to let it play out. One person close to the bank noted that bank lawyers were skeptical it would actually produce charges.” Dimon nicely sized up Holder and Obama behind him, and confidently rode the wave of American political-financial history.

My *New York Times* Comment (Oct. 21) on the aforementioned article (same date):

*This is an exact historical parallel to the DETENTE created by TR in 1903 between the Bureau of Corporations and the House of Morgan, an important step in the interpenetration of government and business, in which the US regulatory framework is based on nonregulation (TR's reputation for trustbusting notwithstanding). Now, Holder-Dimon, \$13B sum the bank can easily absorb and nowhere near the financial losses and human misery its actions brought about on a global basis.*

*DOJ provides a buffer protecting JPMorgan Chase from the kind of prosecution—including criminal charges directed to Dimon and other bank executives—which, from a public standpoint, would reveal the whole ANATOMY of favoritism shown the banking industry and its questionable*

*(moral-legal) practices. \$13B does not begin to scratch the surface of the damage done and the criminal activity pursued. Holder and the Obama administration beginning with Geithner's appointment proved to be a shill for Wall Street, and Dodd-Frank hardly rectified matters in an administration gone deregulation raving-mad (the Clinton-Rubin-Summers influence).*

*Thus I'm not impressed nor surprised by the settlement, a cheap and easy solution to grievous wrongs shielded from scrutiny, let alone prosecution, by the Obama administration. Plus a federal settlement will most probably prevent, under the principle of preemption, action taken by the states. A neat little trick performed by the Dimon-Holder "negotiations."*

OCTOBER 24, 2013

### **Serialization of Political Murder**

At the last moment, checking Webster's on *serialization*, I was struck by its application to music—"based on a series of tones in an arbitrary but fixed pattern without regard for traditional tonality"—which, transposed to political reality, says it all: US policy of armed drones for political assassination is wholly *arbitrary*, here, a conscious decision, Obama, taking from his predecessor the practice, and, with Brennan, escalating and intensifying it, making it his signature weapon in so-called counterterrorism, now a *fixed* pattern, not only maintained in complete secrecy, stretching the CIA charter mission of intelligence into an operational capacity, but also seeking to bind future administrations through the constantly revised hit list poured over with national-security advisers on Terror Tuesdays, and, as for *traditional tonality*, assassination, especially personally authorized by POTUS, is way out of line—can you imagine Jefferson doing this?—and in flagrant violation of international law.

Drone Warfare, despite the secrecy in which USG insists it be enshrouded, is back in the news (not that the actuality had ever left us), in a *New York Times* article, "Civilian Deaths in Drone Strikes Cited in Report," (Oct. 22), by Declan Walsh and Ihsanullah Tipu Mehsud, the report referred to being that of Amnesty International released the same day and centered on Miram Shah, in Northwest Pakistan, while also on Oct. 22 Human Rights Watch issued its report on Yemen.

Neither report, nor The Times piece, will receive national attention, an instructive point to note, because the psychological interface of targeted assassination, as applying to the American public, is *indifference*, or at best mild annoyance at being told of war crimes continually committed in their name. We are reaching rock-bottom as a people, as though having fallen into an amoral dry well, the bread-and-circuses of martial victories and enticing consumerism (the goodies themselves safely out of reach) helping us to maintain a semblance of normality. In East Lansing, Go Green! Go White! And to hell with the victims of US hegemony; they probably weren't Spartan rooters in the first place.

Walsh and Mehsud write: "In the telling of some American officials, the C.I.A. drone campaign in Pakistan has been a triumph with few downsides. In more than 300 missile strikes there since 2008 [itself a large number, but given the secrecy, probably a good deal more], dozens of Qaeda and Taliban leaders have been killed, and the pace of the strikes, which officials frequently describe as 'surgical' and 'contained,' has dropped sharply over the past year." NOT SO. For they continue:



“But viewed from Miram Shah, the frontier Pakistani town that has become a virtual test laboratory for drone warfare, the campaign has not been the antiseptic salve portrayed in Washington.”

Interviews with residents confirm the account of horrors that should, but fail to, shake the conscience of every American, from Obama on down, including the morally oblivious if not sadistic CIA directly involved (no mention is made in the account of JSOC or the *private contractors* who are part of the drone operation in Northwest Pakistan), as in this statement of Nazeer Gul, a local shopkeeper: “The drones are like the angels of death. Only they know when and where they will strike.”

I would that this be inscribed on a banner floating over the White House. It captures the real sense of TERROR felt by every villager subject to drone attacks, the constant whirring overhead all through the night, the fear, insecurity, waiting, waiting. (The Stanford-NYU law faculties’ joint-study emphasizes the psychological-warfare aspect, the deliberate frightening into submission of a total population.)

Walsh and Mehsud continue: “Their claims of distress are now being backed by a new Amnesty International investigation that found, among other points, that at least 19 civilians in the surrounding area of North Waziristan had been killed in just two of the drone attacks since January 2012—a time when the Obama administration has held that strikes have been increasingly accurate and free of mistakes.” (Perhaps Obama is telling the truth here—free from mistakes, in that civilians are the whole point of the attacks: kill ‘em, teach ‘em a lesson; but no, the fiction remains, no civilian casualties, and *besides*, targeted assassination is humane because it results in far fewer casualties—the argument goes—than if we put “boots on the ground” for these operations.)

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif meets Obama today (Oct. 23) and a drone debate is scheduled for the UN on the 25<sup>th</sup>—I expect little, or if somehow pressed to the wall, more self-righteousness on America’s part. Meanwhile, Miram Shah, which, the writers point out, “has become a fearful and paranoid town, dealt at least 13 drone strikes since 2008, with an additional 25 in adjoining districts—more than any other urban settlement in the world.” Again: “Even when the missiles do not strike, buzzing drones hover day and night, scanning the alleys and markets with roving high-resolution cameras.” Yes, there are “Islamist fighters with long hair, basketball shoes and AK-47 rifles” presumably running free everywhere, but as Walsh and Mehsud seem reluctant to admit, “Unusually for the overall American drone campaign, the strikes in the area mostly occur in *densely populated neighborhoods*. The drones have hit a bakery, a disused girls’ school and a money changers’ market, residents say.” (Italics, mine)

Particulars, rather than statistical tabs, are important. Even with a drop in the strike rate, “the constant presence of circling drones—and accompanying tension over when, or whom, they will strike—is a crushing psychological burden for many residents.” A pharmacist in the town bazaar relates that “sales of sleeping tablets, antidepressants and medicine to treat anxiety have soared.” The place in fact is a living hell, militants seeking out and executing those suspected of spying for the Americans, the Pakistani security forces occupying a large base in the northern part of town, soldiers largely confined to base, and state services having “virtually collapsed.”

Finally, citing the Amnesty report, they write: “Last October, it says American missiles killed a 68-year-old woman named Mamana Bibi as she picked vegetables in a field close to her grandchildren. In July 2012, 18 laborers, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed near the Afghan

border.” Bibi’s son and two of her injured grandchildren are coming to the US next week to discuss their experiences. Will anyone listen?

Turning to the Amnesty report, “‘Will I be Next?’ US Drone Strikes in Pakistan,” one finds a photograph of Nabeela, the eight-year-old granddaughter of Mamana Bibi, turned looking toward us, the face of a child, the eyes of a philosopher beyond her years, with her statement in italics: “*I wasn’t scared of drones before, but now when they fly overhead I wonder ‘will I be next?’*” (Disclosure: Nabeela bears an uncanny resemblance to my own granddaughter, Laura, same age. How Obama and his Merry Band of Killers can face themselves or sleep at night is beyond me, except that, obviously, policy is a mirror into the soul.) The report begins: “On a sunny afternoon in October 2012, 68-year-old Mamana Bibi was killed in a drone strike that appears to have been aimed directly at her. Her grandchildren recounted in painful detail to Amnesty International the moment when Mamana Bibi, who was gathering vegetables in the family fields in Ghundi Kala village, northwest Pakistan, was blasted into pieces before their eyes.

Nearly a year later, Mamana Bibi’s family has yet to receive any acknowledgment that it was the US that killed her, let alone justice or compensation for her death.” Tough-it-out, secrecy, push ahead—all the American Way; justice is never done in these cases, and as for compensation—which seems to trouble Amnesty, itself a somewhat moderate voice—what possible compensation can there be, to see one’s grandmother shattered to bits?

The account of the laborers is also worth elaborating, this attack occurring on 6 July 2012, in which they “were killed in a series of drone strikes in the remote village of Zowi Sidgi. Missiles first struck a tent in which some men had gathered for an evening meal after a hard day’s work, and then struck *those who came to help the injured* from the first strike. Witnesses described a macabre scene of body parts and blood, panic and terror, as US drones continued to hover overhead.” I’ve italicized those words to point out what one sees time after time, the strike, then the deliberate second strike, aimed at the first responders—ghoulish and worse, as also in the standard practice of striking the funerals of the victims. In both cases the attacks are justified on the grounds that responders and attendees are fellow terrorists or sympathetic to the cause (reminiscent of the McCarthyism-mindset of rooting out fellow-travellers).

Why not more outrage? Instead, Amnesty in its report falls into the one-said-the-other-said seesaw of avoiding outright condemnation (perhaps I’m being unjust), but calling US drone warfare as “fast becom[ing] one of the most controversial human rights issues in the world,” as though there were two sides to the moral determination of the issue, seems unnecessarily—if I can use the word—balanced. But rather than pursue this, for, after dutifully relating the administration side, about the strikes being based on reliable information, etc., the report does use the significant phrase, “extrajudicial executions,” i.e., war crimes, in summarizing what critics say (although “some of which [the hundreds of civilian deaths] may amount to” that—why not ALL?—gives away the essential moderation), and, in any case, the important thing is the information compiled.

Amnesty is not the Enemy, in regard to drone warfare USG is. Yet a last example: “According to NGO and Pakistan government sources the USA has launched some 330 to 374 drone strikes in Pakistan between 2004 and September 2013. Amnesty International *is not in a position to endorse these figures*, but according to these sources, between 400 and 900 civilians have been killed in these attacks and at least 600 people seriously injured.” (Italics, mine)

To its very sizable credit, Amnesty (and my remarks are confined to this report, not certainly the totality of its activities) provides an in-depth focus on a decisive area where drone strikes occur, and states that “by highlight[ing] incidents in which men, women and children appear to have been unlawfully killed or injured,” it “seeks to shed light on a secretive program of surveillance and killings occurring in one of the most dangerous, neglected and inaccessible regions of the world.” Because USG “refuses to provide even basic information on particular strikes, including the reasons for carrying them out,” Amnesty “is unable to reach firm conclusions about the context in which the US drone attacks on Mamana Bibi and on the 18 laborers took place, and therefore their status under international law.” It is, though, “seriously concerned that these and other strikes have resulted in unlawful killings *that may constitute* extrajudicial executions or war crimes.” (Italics, mine)

The report concerns what Amnesty in boldface terms, “Obligation to investigate,” and faults both the US and Pakistan both for failing in this regard and, the larger failure, not protecting the victims in their human rights under international law. It conducted “60 interviews with survivors, relatives of victims, witnesses,” etc., corroborated testimony with other evidence, verified the exact locations of the two main strikes discussed here, and found the whole task extremely difficult “due to ongoing insecurity and barriers on independent monitoring.” The effort was indeed frustrating, both governments refusing any and all cooperation. Hence, “none of the Pakistani authorities answered questions regarding specific drone strikes or the possible role of some Pakistani officials or private citizens in the US drone program.” The same on the American side: USG’s “utter lack of transparency about its drone program,” its refusal “to make public even basic information about the program” or “release legal or factual information about specific strikes.” Calls were not returned.

I dwell on this because the drone program in its conduct takes on the character of a rogue operation at the highest levels of government. Secrecy is the touchstone for ascertaining illegality, usurpation, moral turpitude in its fullest political sense: the absolute negation of human feeling toward others, justifying, in the depths of nihilism, annihilation-on-the-spot. CIA, JSOC, Blackwater (whatever its new corporate name), may be target-hunting in country, but the trigger releasing the drone missile is 8,000 miles away, a guy seated in plush surroundings probably munching a sandwich.

The process of dealing death is so completely segmented that none involved has to feel pangs of conscience, assuming conscience to begin with, a big assumption when State-sponsored murder is an exercise in routinization under the banner of Protecting the Homeland. When we turn now to Yemen and the report of Human Rights Watch, also released on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, let it not be said that Obama cannot chew gum and walk at the same time, but is quite adept at multi-tasking, in this case—while pursuing massive surveillance at home, positioning naval power in the Pacific to stare down China, easing JPMorgan Chase out of trouble with an affordable fine—revealing a sharp eye on Yemen, presumably countering terrorists yet finding pretext to establish a wider sphere of influence in the region via the flexing of military muscle.

Human Rights Watch seems less reticent about challenging authority, at least in this report, “Between a Drone and Al-Qaeda,” issued in the joint news conference (Oct. 22) with Amnesty International. Bluntly, as in the subtitle, “The Civilian Cost of US Targeted Killings in Yemen,” Watch states that in examining six of these killings there, one from 2009 and the rest from 2012-13, it found that “[t]wo of the attacks killed civilians indiscriminately in clear violation of the laws of

war; the others may have targeted people who were not legitimate military objectives or caused disproportionate civilian deaths.”

This seems par for the course throughout the sad history of targeted assassination. And as in Pakistan, the outcome is the reverse of that intended: “Yemenis,” writes Letta Tayler, author of the report, “told us that these strikes make them fear the US as much as they fear Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.” Like Amnesty, Watch researchers conducted interviews, “more than 90 people,” including witnesses and relatives of the killed.

As usual, USG stonewalled the investigation, “refusing to take responsibility for individual strikes or provide casualty figures, including civilian deaths.” Ditto, the Yemeni government. How could they, given such results as these: “The six strikes investigated by Human Rights Watch killed 82 people, at least 57 of them civilians. They include a US drone-assisted attack in September 2012 in Sarar, central Yemen, that unlawfully struck a passenger van, killing 12 civilians.

Villagers who rushed to the scene found their relatives’ charred bodies dusted in flour and sugar that they were bringing home from a nearby market. The reported target of the strike, an alleged local AQAP leader, was nowhere near the vehicle.” I should comment, although the report does not mention this, that under Obama the term “combatant” referred to ANY male of a certain age (I believe 18-65) in the designated territory, itself considerable, was deemed one, and therefore fair-game for execution. One reason official figures for civilians were so low was because, by that definition, practically no adult males were declared such.

Then the heart-wrenching testimony, enough to send Team Obama on a one-way coach ticket—under guard—to The Hague, this from Ahmad al-Sabooli, 23-year-old farmer: “The bodies were charred like coal—I could not recognize the faces.” Moving closer, the report states, “he realized that three of the bodies, including those of a woman with a young girl still in her lap, *were his father, mother, and 10-year-old sister.*” (Italics, mine) Ahmad al-Sabooli said, “That is when I put my head in my hands and cried.” As should we. But there are no tears in Washington; gung-ho patriotism would not have it otherwise.

Other examples are given. Not a drone, but a cruise missile strike in December 2009, hit “a Bedouin camp in the southern village of al-Majalah,” in which “14 alleged AQAP fighters and 41 civilians, two-thirds of them women and children,” were killed. In this case, “[t]he attack involved *cluster munitions*—inherently indiscriminate weapons that pose unacceptable dangers to civilians.” The report refers more obliquely to my foregoing point about defining “combatant,” i.e., “the US may be using an overly elastic definition of a fighter who may be lawfully attacked during an armed conflict,” and points to a case where “an alleged AQAP recruiter” was killed, even though “recruiting activities alone would not be sufficient grounds under the laws of war to target someone for attack.”

Watch does not believe the “war model” applies to its campaign, and rather, “the US should adopt a law-enforcement approach under international human rights law in addressing armed militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and AQAP.” In their joint news conference both organizations called on Congress to investigate the cases they documented. They also want the Obama administration to “provide its full legal rationale for targeted killings in Yemen and elsewhere.” And I, fork in hand, want to eat green cheese from the moon. They and I have an equal chance of success.

My *New York Times* Comment on Walsh and Mahsud's article, "Civilian Deaths in Drone Strikes Cited in Report," Oct. 22, follows:

NYT readers will of course be outraged, but this has to be said: Never before in US history has a president personally met with advisers (Terror Tuesdays), and from a hit list selected victims for targeted assassination. Obama may shed crocodile tears, he is a murderer, a shameless one, who pleads the disgusting fiction of surgical strikes that kill and kill again. That is his legacy, not health care.

This is premeditated killing. It is also sophisticated **TERRORISM**, for as the Stanford-NYU law faculties' study revealed, the constant buzzing of these death-machines makes life a living hell for villagers in their path. Sleep. Ha. Sense of security. Ha. I wish the experience of Miram Shah, and there are countless other places in Pakistan, Yemen, etc., were replicated in small-town Ohio, Georgia, Kansas, to give Americans a taste of the cold-blooded things done in our name and by our leaders.

Cheer on the Stealth overheads at football games, the staggering military budgets wiping away vitally needed services of the social safety net, the militarism increasingly defining the American mind-set. The US acts as it does because it realizes it can no longer be the unilateral director of world affairs. Obama can move the Stennis to the Pacific, the pivot, rebalance, thinking he can isolate China and retard its growth (or possibly draw it into war), and we can continue spying on France, Brazil, wherever—but the world is saying enough to callous brutality from a pariah nation.

OCTOBER 25, 2013

### **Eavesdropping, Drones, an Integrated Posture**

We are taught to pick-and-choose, but defining the nature of society, its propensity to democracy or fascism, is not like entering the ice cream parlor and selecting chocolate or strawberry. Policies are not discrete. When POTUS personally selects candidates for assassination, his record on bank regulation, gun control, protection of the environment, climate change, surveillance, the countless things that come before him, must be examined critically, each and every one, for evidence of common underlying assumptions and/or consequences for the structure of power, degree of wealth concentration, and class structure. Obama's policy framework is unitary, internally consistent, and, I believe, leaning dangerously toward fascism, if not already there.

Surveillance is, and has always been, the litmus test of antidemocratic societal tendencies. It presupposes secrecy and—the fruits—identification of the scapegoat in order to paper over the arbitrary use of power and the accumulation of power itself. Given its history, surveillance cannot be dismissed as an inadvertency or clumsiness of the novice; it is knowingly administered for questionable ends.

Manipulation is one, preemptive moves another, the outright cover up of war crimes a third, but whatever the purpose sought it redraws the playing field so as to facilitate domination of the offender, subordination the victim. To the latter, it is akin to high-tech or electronic rape, stripping away privacy, diminishing status and identity, denying, to those such as Merkel, Hollande,

Rousseff, possibly Calderon, and the list promises to get bigger, the dignity and security of authority to act consistent with their office.

Obama has demonstrated criminal behavior on many fronts, from drone attacks to paramilitary operations aimed at regime change, to the juridical abomination of indefinite detention, to, of course, intervention per se, none of which is inconsistent with, and in fact energizes, massive surveillance and, betokening utmost cynicism, eavesdropping on foreign nationals and leaders with whom America has treaty-relations, presumed ideological affinities (though not always), joint-military activities, intelligence consanguinity, and for whom it expresses friendship, sincere or otherwise.

In other words, in the eyes of the world, with the exception of those bought off, it is a grifter, con man, even pimp, to remain with more honorable terms. It is selling damaged goods, literally, toxic / exotic financial instruments that brought on the world financial crisis, symbolically, an overweening militarism as protection from—from what ? its own vengeance against those who won't play ball by American capitalist rules.

Political leadership that serves the needs of the public does not require surveillance, both to find out what the people are saying and thinking *and* as a vehicle of social control. And a political leadership that renounces the aim of unilateral hegemonic leadership of the globe, that respects the rights—broadly construed, from trade rights to other nation's own self-determination—does not require eavesdropping abroad. It is not too much to say that surveillance is presumptive evidence of the Police State made or in the making (or that a nation is already two-thirds of the way there with the current propaganda fetish: the National Security State, whose stock-in-trade happens to be, coincidentally, what we've just been describing).

When the aforementioned policy areas are examined, in the present context of surveillance / eavesdropping, say, e.g., drone assassination or ineffective bank regulation, it becomes clear that capitalism depends for its unrestrained development and hegemonic place in the sun exactly the arbitrary solipsistic approach to law, domestic and international, to be trampled on, treated with contempt (witnessed at this moment in USG response to the Snowden revelations and consequent anger manifested today in Brussels), not merely Obama's hand caught in the cookie jar, but arrogance raised to a new level of impunity and immunity, incitement to still further power-grabs as "friends and allies" buckle lest displeasing the Leviathan.

My *New York Times* Comment(Oct. 24) on Alison Smale's article, "U.S. Envoy Is Summoned by Germany Over Spying Report," same date, follows:

The US stands exposed to the world as a menace to human dignity. Blame Snowden? Why, for telling the truth? For shining a moral light into the cesspool of USG policies? He is our Tom Paine; Obama, our Benedict Arnold (along with a gang of war-happy national-security advisers). Angela Merkel and Dilma Rousseff possess the courage to stand up to Obama, and The Times today in its editorial hinting at the self-evident profound immorality of his program of targeted assassination, may, just may, be a straw in the wind that Americans and the world citizenry are now discovering the totalitarian proportions of the US polity—surveillance and eavesdropping, along with assassination, utterly unconscionable and revealing Exceptionalism as the license to kill and deceive.

Sweet-talk our way out? Angela Merkel isn't buying. She is the Joan of Arc standing up to US bullying, and for that we should all be grateful. Repercussions? Perhaps the time-worn "friends and allies" formula will start to break down, and with it, greater skepticism about involvement in US interventions. Maybe EU will seek greater autonomy. Maybe NATO will start to splinter. Maybe the world will start to reject US claims to unilateral hegemonic leadership, and with it, the manipulation of global economic patterns and military paradigms congenial to American power.

Snowden has made us look in the mirror of our wretched demeanor; Angela will not be alone in drawing away from what is there: a spreading cancer.

OCTOBER 28, 2013

### **Bank Regulation, Drone Warfare, Cracks in the Alliance**

The Obama administration isn't inexperienced, it is criminal. This accounts for its failures, all glaringly visible in just the past week, which POTUS himself will not admit as failures but weasel out of through posturing or otherwise invoke specious arguments. Much goes on regularly in USG (no branch is exempt, Congress and the Court vying with the Executive for temporary honors—this may change week-to-week—in elevating capital at the people's expense), so that the recent past is illustrative rather than exceptional in still further weakening the foundations of the Republic. Reaction is on a role in America, wearing the ingratiating smile of liberalism. I refer first to the Eavesdropping Scandal, second, further revelations on targeted assassination, and third, the pending Morgan Chase settlement. I've written on each here, but extensive NYT Comments, not previously published in *CP*, prompt additional discussion, because of an overriding point: the fascistic-inclined symmetry of the Obama policy framework.

Symmetry implies "beauty of form arising from balanced proportions" (Webster's Ninth Collegiate), yet, as in so much else, Obama transmogrifies what he touches or rather puts his mind to, so that "beauty" takes the form of women and children vaporized now blood spats on the pavement thanks to his own authorization and executed from the distance of 8,000 miles off; and "balanced proportions" become so completely out of balance and assuming such grotesque proportions, as to say, what is good for the United States must therefore be good for the rest of the world, and somehow if not, that must not be permitted to change the superior-inferior comprehensive relationship.

Symmetry also, beyond Webster, implies an organic core from which the sum-total of parts radiate out. In America, that core is shared between capitalism and militarism, or analytically speaking, these form a power-oriented syncretism, the resulting fusion structurally realized as the militarization of capitalism, and such offshoots or radiating arcs from the center as deregulation (the better for consolidated private wealth as the economic base for military prowess and commercial expansion to be established), armed drone assassination (the better for making terror a central goal in executing policy), and spying on world leaders (the better to underscore cynicism, nihilism, and openly declaring hegemony, to elicit the response of authoritarian submissiveness) complement and complete the organic systemic design.

There are no mistakes. Banks are deliberately let off the hook, women and children deliberately slain (the signature strikes on first responders and funerals), personal cell phone and state communications deliberately intercepted, because each of these is testimony to the unrestrained power of the offending nation, us (to paraphrase Pogo), and each, deemed essential to keeping the US in a position of global economic-ideological preeminence, the better to serve its capitalistic ambitions and requirements. The converse practice, in each of these areas, would reveal (as Americans see it) unsuspected weaknesses endangering the Homeland, undermining confidence in the efficacy of American might, even call into question the doctrine of Exceptionalism, and the presumed leadership and moral standing domestic and foreign conferred by its tenets of divine blessing. Destroying civilians, their body parts littering the landscape, before the eyes of their families (see Comment 2), is the practical work of pacification, i.e., normalization of the hegemonic assertion. Who would believe US claims to moral leadership in the world, otherwise? Facilitating banking promiscuity, likewise, given the need to strengthen the only morally-ideologically just system, capitalism, particularly its American imprimatur, and keep it safe from terrorists and—the deep-lying anxiety seen in the Red Scare, McCarthyism, and permanently ingrained in the American imagination—the fear of a socialist modernizing alternative. (Whether from cultural lag or opportunism, Russia and China remain on the US most-wanted list, their own socialist credentials now long gone.) And invading the private as well as public space of Merkel, Hollande, Rousseff, and the list is climbing to thirty-five world leaders, is simply frosting on the cake—impunity in capital letters.

The Ship of State is on course. The EU has been put on notice that friendship is spelled in letters of realpolitik, and even then encrypted to hide US multilayered advantages (including the support of NATO in interventionist adventures); Russia, as in Putin's sage advice about not bombing Syria, has stiffened Obama's upper lip; the Pacific-first strategy is fully operable, the deployment of military assets and joint-exercises on schedule; drone attacks in Yemen and Pakistan continuing; embassies reinforced and more greatly fortified (Halliburton, thank you), ditto; in sum, under Obama, I would argue, more than in the case of Bush II and earlier, we see a firm hand on the tiller, speeding from one confrontation to the next, while juicing up the resources—the extreme and still intensifying concentration of wealth—as reward and guiding purpose for all the military effort, as testimony to the virtues of capitalism, and, through wedding upper groups to American militarism, building a domestic society to which all in that strata can be proud: massive surveillance, the increasing abrogation of civil liberties, and the growing disparities of wealth and power.

MY three *New York Times* Comments follow, the first on eavesdropping (Oct. 23), the second, drones (Oct. 24), the third, bank regulation (Oct. 26):

## I

POTUS is remarkable, a multitasker, equally gifted in eavesdropping and assassination, NSA and CIA—what a country and administration to be proud of, amoral to the core. Oh, but Exceptionalism excuses all sins; indeed, transforms sins into virtues. What we see is symptomatic of America's decline in political-economic-ideological terms, which therefore necessitates a drastic increase in military power. And we, the American people, take it, loving every minute of intervention, armed drone attacks, the famous PIVOT to the Pacific, with naval power lined up to isolate, contain, confront China.



Merkel isn't Hollande, himself prepping to become Obama's lap-dog after Blair. The "natives" are rising up! They've seen enough of US global hegemony, and bank practices which brought the world's financial system into crisis. Stupendous military budgets, directly related to a shrinking safety net, is a formula for the predisposition to aggression.

Bipartisan unity on everything fundamental to the degradation of a democratic people and society, with SURVEILLANCE an inexcusable practice of, and sure-fire indication of, the rise of totalitarianism in America, is being carried forward, not by Tea Partiers, but under a liberal/progressive banner, Obama leading the procession followed by Dimon and the Wall Street battalion. Europe is restive, the Far East ditto, because of US violations of international law. And no sensible leadership, say, an Adlai Stevenson, anywhere in sight.

## II

"Transparency and accountability" are the worst enemies of the Obama administration, not only on armed drones for targeted assassination, but also every consequential area of public policy. I urge NYT to see the integrated picture: drones = political murder; massive surveillance = totalitarianism. Together, with deregulation, one finds an alarming configuration of power antithetical to democratic government. My current hero in the world is Angela Merkel, for she alone stands up to this imposter, posing as a statesman.

I have the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports mentioned in the editorial before me, and I deeply thank NYT for bringing them and their contents to the attention of its readers. Let me quote Nabeela, the eight-year-old granddaughter of Mamana Bibi, who was struck down in her garden by a drone missile: "I wasn't scared of drones before, but now when they fly overhead I wonder, WILL I BE NEXT?" (caps, mine) My granddaughter is about the same age and looks very much like her. I cried when I read that and looked at Nabeela's photo in the Amnesty report, the face of a child, the eyes of one who has known tragedy.

I'm sorry. Delete this if you must, but we are dealing with a moral monster, with his hit list and advisers on Terror Tuesdays planning assassinations. Not the stuff of Thomas Jefferson or FDR. The editorial mentions collateral damage: there is widespread evidence of specifically hitting first responders and attacking funerals

## III

Thoughtful editorial, yet insufficiently punitive and not prepared to address the entire regulatory apparatus, whether banking, market, climate change, etc. How expect justice to be done, when regulators historically SHIELD (NYT thankfully uses the term) the interests to be affected? \$13B with respect to Morgan—large as it may seem—leaves the bank, the industry, and regulatory framework perfectly intact, therefore plainly violating NYT's justified call for "adequate redress for the wrongdoing and clear accountability up the chain of command."

Even you admit, "this hardly seems punitive," particularly in light of write-off tax advantages and profitability of units acquired. What's to be done? First, expose the fraudulence of the charge, substantive regulation of Morgan would "endanger the economy," which makes us all HOSTAGE to Morgan, B. of A., and other megabanks. Second, sharpen the attack, largely ignored, of Obama's record of and passion for deregulation, which makes a farce of govt.-in-the-public-interest, and

sharpen the analysis of the harm done by the financialization of capitalism in America, introducing systemic imbalances (viz., weakness of manufacturing, etc.). Third, lower both barrels: there must be criminal prosecutions at the highest levels. Dimon and others should NOT be placed above the law.

The trouble is, they are: Obama, shill for Wall Street; Obama, bleeding the bottom-half of American society, to enrich the upper-tenth. Speak truth to power.

NOVEMBER 4, 2013

### **NSA's Path to Totalitarianism**

The *New York Times*, a recipient, along with the *Guardian*, of Snowden's disclosures about the illegal activities of Obama and USG, is breaking out, as now, of its reticence about the nation's profound disregard of constitutional principles AND its related policies of global hegemony at all costs—here Scott Shane's lengthy article (3 Nov.), “No Morsel Too Miniscule for All-Consuming N.S.A.” NSA to all intents and purposes appears as a “rogue” organization, extremism in the putative service of liberty, except that the designation is a way of distracting attention, and removing accountability, from its authorization and mission at the highest levels—call it, licensed roguery, official (with Obama's eyes supposedly averted). Or better, call it, stripped of all cosmetics, the unerring mark of a Police State, itself become identical with Fortress America, the National-Security State.

Eavesdropping on foreign leaders speaks to an arrogance of power, in which the US claims for itself every right, unilaterally, to script both sides of the foreign dialogue as well as micromanage to its own advantage the rhythm and content of global events, from regional trade partnerships to the use of military force in shoring up alliance systems against a host of enemies, some terrorist groups to be sure, but, using that as pretext, mounting counterrevolution globally against alternative modes, notably, socialist, of modernization: autonomous national and/or radical aspirations seeking distance from US market penetration, the tarnished necklace of its worldwide military bases and CIA stations, and not least, the ideological saturation (assisted by IMF and World Bank applications of pressure) of market fundamentalism, the property right, unrestricted capital flows, and the honor of serving American industry with the lowest possible labor costs, as meanwhile we see the financialization of capitalism here and the gutting of the manufacturing base.

Eavesdropping, of course, is the polite term for control freak, which translates, in the realm of power politics, into societal desperation to employ any and all means for staying on top, cyber-strategies of disruption as well as information-gathering, campaigns of disinformation, CIA-JSOC paramilitary programs of regime change, and, upping the ante, as here, learning every move in advance of foreign leaders, the better—take no chances, take no prisoners—to orchestrate world politics in our favor. E.g., Shane begins, Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, meets with Obama last April to discuss “Syrian chemical weapons, Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and climate change,” all important issues—and in advance, NSA “intercepted Mr. Ban's talking points for the meeting,” indeed, boasted of this in its “weekly internal brag sheet,” calling it an “operational highlight.”

Small potatoes? Not when it illustrates the basic pattern. Obama needs his teleprompter (thank you, Axelrod); he also needs this heavy-handed *spying* (thank you, Clapper). Not because he is a

cipher, but because he obsesses over the minutia of power, careful from the outset to ingratiate himself with the intelligence and military communities, and, with Brennan (still around as DCIA), methodically going about the targeting of drone assassination. Eavesdropping and assassination are indissoluble because emanating from the same hegemonic drive and amoral, nihilistic mindset, which Shane characterizes as, in essence, whatever can be done, *should be done*. Given Obama's near-paranoid fear of transparency, no-one will find out, a paradigm in microcosm for the commission of all manner of war crimes, drone murder a prime example.

Shane's description, in a single sentence, nails down the menace: "From thousands of classified documents, the National Security Agency emerges as an electronic omnivore of staggering capabilities, eavesdropping and hacking its way around the world to strip governments and other targets of their secrets, all the while enforcing the utmost secrecy about its own operations." (Classified documents, be it said, and the practices detailed therein, that would never have been brought to light had it not been for Snowden's revelations—the person presently under indictment as, presumably, America's own bin Laden.) Menace? For starters, Shane: "It [NSA] spies routinely on friends as well as foes...[its] official mission list includes using its surveillance powers to achieve 'diplomatic advantage' over such allies as France and Germany and 'economic advantage' over Japan and Brazil, among other countries." The twofer here—diplomatic / economic—reveals the cynicism, a militarization of US capitalism, viewed as essential to systemic conservation. *That* may be the underlying point, an impending if not already actual decline and senescence of American capitalism, intuitively or even consciously recognized by US political-economic-military elites, requiring a new scale of interventionism and military power to stave off certain loss of domestic well-being and world leadership.

The stakes are high, in ideological as well as all other terms, amounting to the remaking of the global framework, whereby multiple centers of power, none controlling, reduces US commercial and military suzerainty—its overlordship—to, if not just another player, then at least no longer the global architect of counterrevolution and capitalism-in-perpetuity. So we find now NSA eavesdropping has backfired, to the point of allowing "friends and allies" from the EU to individual countries—Spain today, Germany and France days ago, Mexico, Brazil (the list will surely increase as some 35 countries and their leaders have been targeted)—to see America in its belligerent splendor, waging war less on "terrorism" than on social change itself. Dear Clapper, director of national intelligence, denies all wrongdoing—everybody spies, what's the fuss, as he grudgingly admits in public (in private he must boast to the heavens) that NSA has 35,000 employees and a budget of \$10.8B. Not bad, for a hitherto secret operation: a candid picture of why Obama abhors transparency, for it is in the bowels of government that war crimes are hatched.

Commentators have said the NSA is under siege, its legitimacy questioned, Congress now examining whether the agency has violated Americans' privacy rights—yet, we can be sure that nothing will come of the scrutiny, just as another sacred cow has escaped deserved punishment, the CIA; how one nation which has spawned both the NSA and CIA—with their myriad and overlapping abuses of power—can affirm democratic principles, is an historical puzzle for the ages. Shane makes a shrewd comparison, implying that of the two, NSA is the more dangerous: "The C.I.A. dispatches undercover officers overseas today to gather intelligence roughly the same way spies operated in biblical times. But the N.S.A., born when the long-distance call was a bit exotic

[1952], has seen its potential targets explode in number with the advent of personal computers, the Internet and cellphones.

Today's N.S.A. is the Amazon of intelligence agencies....It sucks the contents from fiber-optic cables, sits on telephone switches and Internet hubs, digitally burglarizes laptops and plants bugs on smartphones around the globe." (Don't feel sorry for the CIA, however, in this race toward infamy, because, although Shane neglects to say, the CIA in its now operational capacity works hand-in-glove with private contractors from Northwest Pakistan to Djibouti, launching drones from airstrips on their deadly missions.) And he adds that while Obama defends the NSA's "role in preventing terrorist attacks," this counterterrorism-emphasis "is a misleadingly narrow sales pitch for an agency with an almost unlimited agenda. Its scale and aggressiveness are breathtaking." Say what one will about NYT's accommodating attitude toward the administration, reporting by Shane, Charlie Savage, and others make up for the Editorial Board's circumspection. (Shane writes at one point: "At the agency's request, The Times is withholding some details that officials said could compromise intelligence operations." I should have preferred to let The Times, not the agency, make the judgment calls.)

That breathtaking scale and aggressiveness, as revealed by the documents, is evident all over the place: storing years of text messages from everywhere, accumulating "gigabytes of credit card purchases," even, via Snacks (Social Network Analysis Collaboration Knowledge Services), figuring out "personnel hierarchies of organizations from texts." The world is the American oyster, to pry open and do with as we will. Examples: eavesdropping equipment on a D. of D. plane 60,000 feet over Columbia, feeding "the location and plans of FARC rebels to the Colombian army"; setting up a "'honeypot' computer on the web" attracting visits from foreign computers and planting spyware on those "the agency deemed of potential future interest"; and "mounting a major eavesdropping effort focused on a climate change conference in Bali." Throughout its activities, NSA claims the moral high ground. Signet (i.e., Signals Intelligence)—states the agency's five year plan, which was not to be officially declassified until 2032—counters "adversaries [who] will say or do anything to advance their cause; we will not." Meanwhile, naval vessels snap up "radio transmissions as they cruise off the coast of China," satellite dishes at Fort Meade take in "worldwide banking transactions," and rooftop antennas at some 80 US embassies and consulates, via NSA's Special Collection Service, perform due diligence, i.e., spying.

But today, given the prevalence of pc's, laptops, tablets, etc., "in most homes and government offices in the developed world, hacking has become the agency's growth area." There is T.A.O. (Tailored Access Operations) for breaking into computers worldwide and leaving "spy software behind," especially important because "it allows the agency to bypass encryption by capturing messages" before they are encoded. NSA's special divisions, the Transgression Branch is another, divides up the work in the latest corporate modeling, acronyms beyond mention, suggesting to me a bureaucratic framework designed to sanitize operations as the normalization of espionage, cyberwarfare, repression, here and abroad, for surely, what NSA "accomplishes" in plan, method, technique, is equally useful in the furtherance of massive domestic surveillance. The cancer is very real. My question, is it becoming inoperable?

*My New York Times Comment* (Nov. 3) on the aforementioned article:

After all...who's going to find out?" The NSA mindset, secretive, hubristic, acting with impunity and feeling invincible (as well as believing itself invisible), is a menace and disgrace to America, allowed to operate freely because government and people alike have entered the realm of totalitarianism. NSA's very existence, tolerated by and—judging from its budget—encouraged by POTUS and Congress, proves as much.

NSA is a window into how far the US has slid from democratic principles, a unitary policy framework of Reaction that perfectly mirrors American foreign policy in general: Obama's signature, targeted assassination, his enlarging role for the CIA, his Pacific-first geostrategic move to isolate and contain China, his CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, all confirm and elaborate massive domestic surveillance, abrogation of civil liberties, eavesdropping on foreign leaders. Whence America's direction, except to further baleful consequences?

Clapper deserves censure, but that will not happen because he is acting with Obama's full approval. Dilma and Angela are heroines in the fight to preserve comity in international relations, with Obama and USG, hiding behind counterterrorism, the war criminals on the scene. The world knows this; the climate of international relations is chilling, in response to US unrestrained actions. Hegemony, given these actions, has become a dirty word, fit only for those committed to besting others through illegal means.

NOVEMBER 7, 2013

### **Obama's Inversion of Organizational Mission**

Change you can believe in; no, change as the fuller articulation of US global hegemony, no semblance of scruples remaining. Obama did not arise in a policy vacuum. The main contours of American history from the start have sought and by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century achieved the establishment of a peculiarly crystalline capitalism as the foundation of the polity, culture, ideology—call it Exceptionalism if you will, but essentially it is antirevolutionary, systemically prone to class-differentiation and an ever-widening gulf with respect to wealth, income, power, all vested in a numerically small upper stratum buttressed by control over property and the mechanisms of government, and constantly expanding its reach both domestically (penetrating and defining American consciousness) and internationally (self-appointed architect of the world capitalist system and defender of the faith, against all alternative economic and belief systems). So, poor Obama. We can't blame him for everything. BUT we can hold him accountable for the intensification of previous structural-political-ideological trends, all in the service of the selfsame upper stratum, whatever its changing and evolving composition and character.

We can, moreover, make him the litmus test for the utter grotesqueness of liberalism as it now exists, i.e., the mouthpiece for corporate capitalism in its presumably most sophisticated form. None of the Republican and Tea Party Neanderthalism, but the genuine article—the financialization and militarization of American capitalism brought now to the forefront, no longer existing in an incipient state, but muscles flexed, waving the new banner of humanitarian interventionism, to hide the old banner of imperialism pure and simple.

Obama's Inversion? Everything is what it should not be, starting with the very regulatory framework thought to be in the service of the *public interest*. It, of course, never really was, except

for isolated state experiments which the federal government largely nullified through preemption. At no point has America had a people's government. Obama, however, rubs salt in the wound. His ultimate trajectory, an overriding National Security State which intentionally bleeds, and soaks up the revenue for, a life-sustaining social safety net, itself falling under the not-so-subtle pressures of privatization, as witness Obamacare with its corporate parasitism as one sector—there are many—of government-sponsored profit-taking to the major players (here, enough to go around for the health insurers, Big Pharma, etc).

Regulation does not regulate; it's part of the internal rationalization process to ensure against unwanted internecine competition, so that monopolistic or oligopolistic business and banking structures emerge free from competition or public harassment, safely ensconced in the bosom of an all-caring, protective government. Why this political-economic affinity to monopolism, a state of mind Theodore Roosevelt first gave us in reasoning that a powerful economic base is essential to the projection of American power in the world. Somehow, the House of Morgan and a Battleship Navy go together. They still do, even if the bank name and the weapon(s) of choice change. Military Keynesianism is perhaps too glib a phrase and accounts for too little of the ruling Exceptionalism-militarism synthesis, yet, slightly reworked, it provides for some useful insights. Beyond the importance of defense industries to the national economy, the stock market, and employment rates, not a negligible factor when capitalism has reached an advanced, mature, or possibly senescent stage—America without Boeing or Halliburton would hardly be the same—it is rather the indirect contribution of monopolism to militarism that now, more than in TR's day, proves decisive.

The American need for strength, prowess, feelings of invulnerability, as the ideological paradigm of growth, development, survival, runs deep, so deep as to be not only taken for granted, but viewed as by right the fruits of the virtues of capitalism, America its chief exemplar. The world is witness to the splendor of our achievements and institutions, all under God's aegis and watchful eye. No intervention is wrong, no monopoly too big, no weapon system too inhumane. Militarism in this case works from the inside out: a structural core of business and banking giantism which blankets the American universe of thought and discourse, making acceptable the notion of *hierarchy* in all things pertinent to social control, from the class system and the internalization by lower social groups of their inferior status in the pecking order of domination and subordination, to the expected deference shown Authority, be it economic, political, military, the supposed "betters," elite groups to which we all owe our well-being and security. Capitalism demands no less, so that, not coincidentally, business organization and military organization represent the same hierarchical features ensuring the transmission of authority from the top downward (and corresponding, as well, to the trickle-down framework of wealth creation), so that opponents, dissidents, even those not showing sufficient patriotism—whether to capitalism or the nation—must be marginalized, if not worse.

Mega-business is a source of identity and pride, inseparable from the nation and system that made it possible. It also, by chance, requires military support to make its way into the world of finance and trade. The core here dictates the environment in which it prospers: stable international capitalism as the groundwork within which the US is preeminent in regularizing political-economic relationships and power-arrangements found acceptable, on behalf of American capitalism, to essentially the same ruling groups holding sway in domestic society. In sum, we are habituated

through educational and ideological overkill to think and act in terms of corporatism, hence in terms of militarism. Bestiality is smoothed out to indicate valor. Gradations of murder find social acceptance when done in the name of the nation, war, for starters, through drone assassination, torture, etc., the while leaving what stands behind the nation, capitalism, in shadows and entirely blameless.

Still, this is militarism at possibly one step removed, its presence informing an entire institutional and cultural order predicated on forcible acceptance and/or expansion of the American Way (deliberately kept open-ended so as to allow commodity fetishism, displays of armed strength, and actual military conquest, in joyful combination and integration, to do their work, with respective appeals to all classes). Closer to home, militarism under Obama is anything but remote or indirect; it is the cohesion holding society together, the cement making for bipartisan continuity in all things fundamental. (If Bill Clinton, Bush II, and Obama differ on intervention, war, capitalist needs as dictated by its leading players, I must have missed it.) Obama, for all his secretiveness, is the easiest to read, a smart-alecky take, using as a front, counterterrorism, on the global power system in which US military superiority will pull American capitalism back up by its bootstraps. Negotiate military alliances wherever possible, in order to ensure that feet have been planted for creating or enlarging a sphere of influence, notably, the Middle East and the Pacific, drone bases serving as sentinels in one, aircraft carrier battle groups in the other, and CIA-JSOC operations filling in the interstices and cutting a wider figure.

Who would have expected—in the summer of '08, before the election to a first term? We had Geithner, before the Wall Street dust had even rubbed off (it never did); Hillary, transforming State into an annex of the Pentagon; Brennan, fresh from theories of “just war,” to fashion the hit-list which vaporized human beings; along with an assorted cast of presumed liberals, Rahm Emanuel being typical rather than odd-person out, and Larry Summers, the go-to-guy for a deregulated economy, hedge funds in the vanguard. This is surely a motley crew for purposes of achieving much-needed democratization. (From the standpoint of wealth-concentration, we are now about as far away as ever from a more equalitarian sharing of wealth and power.) Perhaps worse still, one finds not a word, not a breath, from Democrats, Obama on down to all but a few members of Congress, against the Behemoth which has come to occupy front and center of the US polity, and whose appetite for a perpetual state of readiness, as embodied in the doctrine of permanent war, is directed today against terrorism, tomorrow, fellow capitalists, whose growth and performance threaten to top our own, while waiting in the wings, intervention, boycotts, whatever appears most injurious, against socialists and whomever is perceived to represent alternative paths to modernization.

The outer shell of hegemony is left intact while the substance supporting the scaffolding, military power, is actually eating away at the vitals, the structure of society, so that the instrument of hegemonic might becomes the destroyer of that which it is intended to serve. Militarism has run amuck in America, a self-defeating condition because the resources it takes to keep Behemoth happy and in fighting trim (pardon the pun, if that is one) comes directly out of the hide of a comprehensive social safety net worthy of an advanced industrial society, especially one claiming to be the vehicle of global democracy and itself one. The absorptive process, a redirecting of national wealth into outright WASTE, breeds a cynicism in all concerned, leaders and led alike, converting the morally unthinkable into the pragmatic thinkable, and anaesthetizing the American

mindset to militarism in its myriad forms, manifestations, and auxiliaries, e.g., massive surveillance, nominally, to combat terrorism, a condition then readapted to signify dissent, unorthodoxy, and lack of patriotism. War especially requires anaesthetizing, as when POTUS personally authorizes and selects targets for assassination. None of this is normal. For some time USG has been turned upside down. Interior signs contracts for drilling on public lands.

Health and Human Services sits idly by as the nation's health is inadequately protected, and its FDA obliges all comers with dubious claims and insidious outcomes. State hires private contractors and negotiates their immunity as having diplomatic status for crimes they commit with impunity in the assigned countries, murder among them. Defense, but why go into that can of worms—a sprawling Murder, Inc., that would have been the envy of Lepke and gangsterdom in an earlier period. Everywhere the same, or nearly so—what I termed an inversion of organizational mission, i.e., doing the opposite through going over to the side of those to be regulated, and therefore having not the foggiest idea of, let alone the principle of, the public interest.

The social pathology of militarism is not the whole of the story, but it *is* Obama's joystick both for guiding the ship of state and in literal terms a *joy* stick by which to derive the gratification and benefits of leadership, including the snappy salute deplaning, photo ops with top brass in the background, and, more seriously, actively participating in the rite of national greatness, whether that lies in confronting China or ordering paramilitary operations and drone assassinations increasingly worldwide. Yet, there is the further question of the relationship between militarism and capitalism, specifically, its unrestricted sway and ability to command acceptance and even devotion of those, here, Americans, who live under its influence. Economic patriotism is a case of psychopathology reinforced through and stimulated by militaristic visions of world supremacy.

Without the military-component, Exceptionalism would become threadbare, having no visible means of demonstration or exemplarity. All that would remain is stripped-down capitalism, a perhaps self-enclosed jungle of buyers and sellers at each other's throats. Militarism satisfies the operational necessities which must be fulfilled to counter the proneness to stagnation, this by empowering a nation to dictate the terms of trade, orchestrate commercial and financial standards, and, when necessary, batter down obstructions to capitalist development and expansion—in this case, an American solipsistic view of the world which will not accept limits to its power, let alone countenance disparagement of its supposed ideals.

I am describing a continuous pattern, not to exonerate Obama, but to place him squarely within it, and I believe, intensifying its more damaging features. One could start with the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Monroe Doctrine, or later, the Open Door, essentially the Imperialism of Free Trade, or still later, the internationalism of Wilson, as integrating centralized banking with an active export-orientation, and on and on, but let's pause instead on the past week—two things catching my eye. John Kerry in the last few days journeyed to Cairo and Riyadh, first to give the US's blessings to the Egyptian generals, their military coup, the overthrow of the duly elected Morsi government, and therefore assist in burying the Arab Spring, and then, to the Saudi capital, where he hardly registered disapproval over its continuing conflict with Iran and other measures in the region. And Hillary Clinton is back in the news, the subject of an op-ed piece in *The Times* which criticized her manifest careerism, but said nothing about her own role at State in furthering two wars and waxing aggressive on counterinsurgency, Keystone XL, the facilitation of American capitalism abroad.



None of this is out of the ordinary, except that Kerry and Clinton, one, with a hard exterior and marshmallow interior (so eager is he to please), the other, hard-as-nails interior and somewhat soft exterior (determined to wield power), both superbly illustrate the free pass given the military and a geostrategic vision of global counterrevolution. Perfect for their time and place, compatriots in the advancement of an otherwise stalled American capitalism. As for the inversion of organizational mission, who ever thought the State Department would become another Pentagon?

My *New York Times* Comments on Michael R. Gordon's article, "Egyptians Following Right Path, Says Kerry" (Nov. 4) and Frank Bruni's op-ed piece, "Hillary in 2016? Not So Fast" (Nov. 5), both of which provided me the basis for exploring further, follow:

**I** Sec. Kerry appears to be on the wrong side of every issue; his use of the term "tactic" is a disgraceful way of blurring and/or falsifying positions on which firm stands should be taken. The Saudis want more support for the Egyptian military than even the US presently gives, so that Kerry's stop in Cairo sanctioned a military coup that deserves condemnation. The Saudis want Iran to be weakened if not destroyed, and again Kerry sits on the fence and placates Riyadh, instead of seeking peace in the region. Too, there is Assad in Syria, and no question, this is obviously a Sunni-Shiite conflict the US should not, by seeking regime change, do Saudi bidding.

Stepping back, one sees US foreign policy literally panting for war—following Saudi and Israeli lead in the Middle East, pressing for the containment and isolation of China with Obama's Pacific-first strategy and the "pivot" of military forces (chiefly naval power) to that region, a bristling at Putin and Russia for stopping the bombing of Syria, drone assassinations in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia—where will it end? Clearly, Kerry is the right man for the job, eager to please Obama (as Blair was, Bush), showing virtually no conviction and willing to do POTUS's bidding. II "There's no poetry in them [the person and her vision]": half-right, for there's no prose either, from the standpoint of the democratization of American society. Hillary is to all intents a man in woman's clothing, given her unabashed militarism (e.g., calling for an Afghan surge greater than the Pentagon asked), her hard-nosed foreign policy (including sanctioning drone assassination), in sum, her total commitment to US global hegemony, which is a plus, as Democrats see it, and a moral aberration for the few of us who view America as on the path to a totalitarian society.

**II** Hillary on the NSA and massive surveillance? Not a word. Hillary on eavesdropping on world leaders (occurring on her watch as well as before and later)? Silent as the tomb. Hillary on CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations intended for regime change and/or destroying socialist governments? Ditto.

Those who dwell on the beauties of a women president represent the reification of GENDER as a desideratum in its own right, regardless of policy. Fine, we'll see Hillary (and Schumer) with the same Wall Street banking crowd, the same gospel of deregulation Bill worshiped before to bring on the financialization of capitalism, to the detriment of American working people as well as the integrity of the system itself.

I expect Hillary to receive the nomination in '16, showing the Democratic party's journey of moral bankruptcy since the days of FDR and the New Deal. Her liberalism is tarnished, unworthy the name.

NOVEMBER 8, 2013

## **Silent Repression in America**

*Following a long telephone conversation last night (6 Nov.) with CP contributor Mark Epstein about the nature of fascism and societal repression—his point that fascism / totalitarianism does not require the concentration camp, and that we as a people have internalized the structural-ideological poisons of advanced capitalism, e.g., militarism, consumerism—both of which I wholeheartedly agree (I was about to say, internalization, just as he said it) and also which put me in mind of a CP article I wrote several months ago, “Toward a Definition of Fascism,” I’d like now, briefly, to continue the train of thought.*

America escaped the historical experience of outright Naziism, although taking American history as a whole, certainly chattel slavery, thence political-institutional racial segregation, Red-Scare round-ups, Japanese internment in World War II, the current vast black prison population, and much else besides, indicate a continuing vein of repression, punctuated by ethnocentrism and xenophobia, as well as an ingrained ideological contemptuousness for the poor (and, admittedly, working people in general), that, not in severity, but underlying propensity, hardly justifies a clean bill of health when referring to social-political-economic authoritarianism. Our concentration camps are the exception, not the rule; Hitler, in all candor, did not leave his footprint on America. Yet repression is indelibly present here, structurally evident in the seemingly mandatory need of capitalism to enlist the unquestioned loyalty of its subjects, as though a system so fragile it envisions two specters: revolution under every bed, worse still, that consumers will stop buying, that advertising will lose its hold, that the narcotic of invidious distinction will wear off. We are enthralled to the machinery of waste, the drum beat of war and its preparation serving to dull the senses and drive out the utter insanity of wealth accumulation for its own sake and boasting rights against all others.

Sounds harmless enough, when compared with the crematoria. Perhaps so, yet dehumanization, while preferable to hideous death, not only—as I see it—is evil per se, but also leads, through callousness and cynicism, to the eventual building of the selfsame crematoria for those who stand in the way, primarily through achieving an alternative mode of life and social organization, and also, from there, a refutation of self-indulgence and the social insanity defining Americans’ identity and way of life. A harsh judgment, offensive to patriotic instincts? Undoubtedly. Yet that does not change the reality in which an advanced industrial nation must resort to armed-drone assassinations to further its national interests and keep up its morale—assassination but a microcosm of the operational might of US militarism penetrating every corner of the globe. We are told, to be an advanced industrial nation carries certain responsibilities: be kind to the “natives” by giving them jobs (outsourcing), responsible governments (who follow our whims, dictates, political-military-ideological objectives) via humanitarian interventionism, and because so enthused, obligated, driven to fulfill our Exceptionalist glory and destiny, we may at the same time be pardoned from neglecting to look after the social welfare of the home front, too busy, in fact, to want to sully the work of bringing democracy to the world, that a rigidified corporatism, wealth concentration, the increase of entrenched poverty, crumbling infrastructure, deteriorating education, spoliation of the environment, all represent a small price to pay for America’s selfless works of charity and philanthropy on a global basis.

If you buy that, as most Americans do, I have the Brooklyn Bridge to sell you cheap. A protofascistic social order, threatening to blossom forth in full form, is not, however, a laughing matter. My title, “From Barbed Wire to Invisible Fences,” is intended to suggest what lies beyond, and is a substitute for, the concentration camp. Repression comes in many varieties, selectively evolved from the nation’s history, institutions, culture, in the case of the US, a systemic habituation to violence, accustomed deference to upper groups, raw individualism as license for everything from antisocial behavior to unlimited acquisition, all wrapped in the mantle of democracy and the Constitution, not as restraining forces, but to legitimate the traits and practices themselves. Amoral cynicism becomes transmuted into a higher morality, defensive walls ensuring against self-doubt. It is the certainty of rectitude, no matter the depths of depravity reached by an action (saturation bombing at the outset in Iraq), the demeaning and depersonalization of an enemy (as in vaporizing humans through drone warfare), or the diplomatic- military posture of global hegemony (the Pacific-first strategy to contain, weaken, confront China) and counterrevolution using counterterrorism as a cover (CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations aimed at regime change), that warrants and validates describing the mindset as protofascistic on the verge of becoming still more lethal.

Certainty of rectitude, as separate elements, or especially combined, as components of Exceptionalism, bodes ill for the resistance to *repression*, particularly since together, including the ideological context, they underwrite its necessary mindset in America, not through physical clobbering, but the individual’s own introjection of the capitalistic universe of thought and discourse, as a form of self-neutralization when it comes to radicalism or advocacy for social change. Barbed wire is unnecessary, except for the few who transcend false consciousness, and even then, quieter, more regularized, normalized means of intimidation, usually having the sanction of law, will do, so as not to upset or reveal subtler patterns of social control to the same end of inducing conformity and silencing dissent. On many suburban lawns in America one sees not barbed wire but invisible fences for keeping dogs from straying off the property line of the owner. And certainly, we can treat our people as well as our dogs. Instead of a long leash, an internalized acceptance of order, defined by Authority, inculcated, permeating consciousness, is both more effective and pleasing to the tenets of democracy, as commonly understood and practiced.

Capitalist man (gender bias not intended) is expected to exist in a condition of obedience as the ideal source of structural stabilization and economic submission, both necessary to the disposal of surplus production and high profit margins; critical awareness is construed as a mortal threat to the systemic features of class power, ideological predominance, the disposition to militarism, war, and intervention, all of which can come undone—to the ultimate collapse of capitalism—if not sufficiently and constantly reinforced. The invisible fences are the concentration camps of the mind; no guards or locks visible, the individual, culturally prepped to accept and help in bringing about the fragmentation of the personality structure so as to be the dutiful consumers of political reaction, economic shoddiness, ideological self-assumed superiority. We have a word for this human condition of self-pacification, *alienation*.

In Marx, it is derived from the commodity-structure of capitalism, which is a persuasive explanation at the epistemological and depth-psychology levels; yet for everyday purposes one can suggest instead the overriding implementation by ruling groups of the sum-total availability of pressures to deconstruct the human mind, the breakdown of the autonomous self, by virtue of the

cultural-institutional elimination of whatever encourages the separateness of identity from capitalist-nationalist values and principles, and from that position of detachment the next and imperative phase, its reintegration into solidaristic bonds of class feeling, motivation, and interest. The conception of class must be destroyed in order for the individual to remain imprisoned in the walls of acquisitiveness, its near-neighbor, consumerism, and taking on greater importance for its diversionary aspect as well as instrumental role in the expansion of capitalism, militarism.

Successfully breaking through the invisible fences will no doubt bring about the barbed wire; still, ruling groups remain confident that perpetual war, enough opposition to democratization (as in placing limits on the social safety net, including health insurance in this category), so that the citizenry can neither gain a glimpse of authentic welfare by rights nor experience a standard of living freed from sacrifice or want, and the occasional use of force to display the powers of the State, would be sufficient for inducing compliance with the dictates of, and promoting a sense of inferiority within, the class structure, along with cues, notably the resounding calls to, and praise of, intervention, to ensure the result of ineffectual actors for social change. The velvet glove does not deny, only hides from sight, the mailed fist which lies beneath.

It does not surprise that massive surveillance has been taken in stride by the nation, rather than seen as a species of force, albeit of the velvet-glove variety. Here again the concentration-camp analogy sets up a false standard: succumbing to power can be achieved through legitimate channels of cultural-political indoctrination via the party system, the ideological fusion of capitalism and democracy, entertainment, even sport (from valuing combativeness to converting partisanship into the psychodynamics of loyalty), in sum, an ongoing bread-and-circuses, as the trivialization of both individual and national experience to displace inner moral bearings, now supplanted by nihilistic self-interest. When in the Spring of 1960 I sat on the couch of our apartment with Isaac Deutscher, there to celebrate passing my “generals” in the American Civilization program at Harvard, he said how the atmosphere had changed since his last visit to Cambridge, when researching at Houghton Library. Before, McCarthyism was so tangible that people avoided him and he could not discuss his work (I believe, then, the Trotsky biography) in a normal way, but now (1960), all sweetness and light, no longer any need to be wary. YET, he went on, things have become far worse. Why—although I already knew the answer from my limited experience? Because in the US, he said, people had fully *internalized* McCarthyism to the point that external repression was no longer necessary. We observed the boundaries of societal decorum, perhaps even without thinking. The proof of the pudding: the gradual shrinkage of the approved political-ideological spectrum over the course of decades. Today, Obama passes as a liberal; in 1960, he would have been seen as a Right-wing opportunist, and liberalism itself, straying far from the path when the term had substantive bite during the New Deal.

We have internalized commodity fetishism (to recur to Marx), but also more besides, a reified militarism for its own sake, happily existing with or without consumerism, and a lurking psychopathology of power accounted for by the changing structure of world politics, whereby the US is no longer free, with the rise of multiple centers of power, to act unilaterally in guiding the global system exclusively in our own self-interest. Whether barbed wire or invisible fences, break-out time is upon us, to learn to live in comity with others, disposed to equality at home, else the growing pariah-status of the US in its singular quest for hegemonic certainty catches hold in world opinion, coupled with its actual deteriorating position in all things save for overwhelming military

force, brings a precipitous decline that interventions, drones, carrier battle groups, eavesdropping, IMF / World Bank machinations to implement the “Washington Consensus” of market fundamentalism, cannot halt. Just today, we read in the *New York Times* that the CIA is in the business of domestic surveillance (here, in partnership with AT&T), again, no surprise, just another straw in the wind, repression in America wearing a smiley face, the roadmap pointing to a stage of totalitarianism specifically boiling down to fascism.

NOVEMBER 11, 2013

### **Iran Nuclear Talks**

I am not an expert on Iran (or for that matter, anything else), but it is clear that the US and Israel alike fear its autonomy as a factor in structuring the political-military situation in the Middle East *and* global power-relations in general. America is Israel’s ally, obviously; less obvious, the US thereby has established a sphere of influence in the region, beyond considerations of oil, which allows it a viable military presence to gain influence (i.e., attempt to regulate internal affairs to its own advantage) over a far wider sweep of territory. Djibouti with its drone base is both symbol and concrete example of the US presence and penetration, taking in North Africa, Southern Europe, and, meanwhile, partially checking Russia in the region and forming a jumping-off place for directly pressuring China, from West to East (the Obama Pacific-First strategy, already backed by naval power and long-range aircraft, exerting even stronger pressure, East to West). In sum, the Middle East (a) must be left a cauldron so as to provide pretext for US military activity, and (b), become the geopolitical center for confronting, simultaneously, Russia and China. Iran’s neutralization (if not worse) is the precondition for both.

It ill-behooves Israel to obstruct a settlement, given its own nuclearization of armed power, wrapped in absolute secrecy, but that is expected, its democratic pretensions long ago abandoned, not only with respect to the Palestinians, but also, aligning with world Rightist currents against indigenous popular movements and struggles. Its capacity for stirring the pot of international conflict, the US its compliant servant, is boundless. Yet, compliant servant or not, the US, in reciprocal fashion, uses Israel for its own grandiose ends, the aforementioned geopolitical framework a case in point. US hegemony, a phase truly operable only for the half-century following World War Two, has come to an unceremonious end, with the rise and reality of a multipolar world capable of resisting American unilateral leadership. The massive eavesdropping is symptomatic of US desperation in resisting dislodgement from the top of the power pyramid. And the flashes of anger in response is itself indication that the “friends and allies” theme, in order to marshal military and diplomatic support for US interventions, is starting to wear thin.

The Colossus of Washington, despite its comparative youth in world historical terms, is now becoming senescent, its industrial capacity diminishing, its infrastructure crumbling, etc., only its military power enlarging—America, a fearful, neurotic shell, and volatile core. Other nations are already planning areas of disengagement, to which the US in its determined quest for forcing European and Pacific Trading Partnerships (again, on its own terms, e.g., no restriction on tobacco products in the Far East), is making reply—in the long-term, to what avail? Obama’s blatant militarism, as in armed-drone assassination and fuller employment of paramilitary operations directed to hemispheric supervision and regime change in general, will not suffice to stave off

political-economic-ideological decline in the world (while making ideological conformity at home a number-one priority, as a cloak to cover militarily-aggressive policies abroad and the failure of societal democratization in America).

Why, then, Iran? In part, the US declining fortunes fosters the conviction in falling-domino theory. It becomes imperative to take stands, to enhance the nation's "credibility," as when Obama draws red lines in the sand verifying his and America's credentials of toughness. Failure to stand up to Iran invites charges of weakness (yes, the Cold-War mentality is alive and well in 21<sup>st</sup> century America). But then there is China, and perhaps, collectively, Latin America, and the European Union—where will it all end? A further explanation for why Iran, turns on the obverse of the falling-domino theory, the militarization of American capitalism: Strangelovian juices are needed to keep the system operating at supposedly peak-performance, although given the inevitable military outlays, the social safety net will suffer and class-differentiation will widen dramatically. Hold the line, therefore! Prevent Iran from loosening the noose around its neck, and keep Israel, and now more vocally, Saudi Arabia, happy, at the same time, warning Russia and China the Exclusive Superpower is here to stay, prepared to move pieces around the chess board of power politics in order to maintain that status.

My *New York Times* Comments on Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler, "Roadblocks Remain as Officials Work Toward Iranian Nuclear Pact" (Nov. 8), and Landler and Gordon, "Talks With Iran Fail to Produce a Nuclear Agreement" (Nov. 10), follow:

## I

Before praising POTUS and Sec. Kerry for taking a more constructive stance on Iran, we should step back and recognize that Catherine Ashton in forcing the US hand is performing a similar role to that of Putin, in preventing a US attack on Syria. In both cases, the US sanctions regime, and bombing Syria, the world community (minus Israel and the Saudis, themselves strange bedfellows) would strongly disapprove AND no doubt the EU would no longer cooperate on sanctions.

The US/Israel hard line on Iran is destined to fail. Obama and Kerry realize this, Netanyahu, in his brazen disregard for world opinion, does not. Israeli belligerence further confirms its growing pariah status in the international community. Thrown out of UNESCO and continuing settlement constructions suggest a savoring of that status, the desire to be a world spoiler. It's not working.

Given Obama and Kerry's sordid record on intervention, drone assassination, and the globalization of market fundamentalism (trade agreements, both Europe and the Pacific Partnerships), it is clear that the US is adamant about national self-interest, so that this break in the clouds with respect to Iran is less to their credit than it is testimony to EU disgust with US policymaking. NSA global eavesdropping is, of course, a factor in that disgust. Like Israel, America, by its actions, is fast losing friends—perhaps soon we will see the breakup of NATO. The Saudi-Israeli stance on Iran and Syria will also prove harmful.

## II

It is hard for a nation to negotiate with a gun pointed to its head. Rather than a quid pro quo, I should like to see the EU, with or without US blessings, break ranks and lift for a set period the oil embargo and economic sanctions—say, three months of total abrogation of the sanctions regime, which lifts the gun and allows Iran to maintain its honor while moving toward compromise and/or agreement.

The two obvious spoilers are Israel and the US Congress, neither of which should be allowed to wreck a settlement, although, patently, neither wants other than extreme punitiveness with respect to Iran. The world must move on, the spoilers notwithstanding. Iran perceives itself being ganged up on, and with its new leadership it deserves the chance to resume membership in the international community. Sanctions hurt not a

government, but the people—we have no data on the suffering incurred, but a whole generation feels the pain, a condition which can only result in long-term hostility and a push toward extremism.

Netanyahu and Obama (with Kerry the messenger boy) seek a Middle East paradigm entirely one-sided, ensuring perpetual conflict in the region.

NOVEMBER 13, 2013

### **Incognito, Obama, and the Dynamics of Bullying**

Richie and Barack, our beloved personification of America, embody the creed of hegemony so dear to the nation's heart and central to its character. Incognito ridicules and hazes Jonathan Martin, fellow offensive lineman on the Miami Dolphins, Obama, his own form of hazing and ridicule, assassinates, via armed drone warfare, those perceived to be America's enemies, only, in fact, resulting in widespread collateral damage (Pentagonese, for murdered civilians) which includes women, children, adult males deemed combatants because found in a designated territory. Unrelated developments? Without the Incognitos of this world, stretching far beyond the NFL locker-rooms, who by their conduct and values legitimate violence, and the still larger number of Americans, fully complicit, turning away, there could not be the impersonal killings, personally authorized by Obama, his team wholly approving, and eliciting silence from a public bent on perpetual hegemony, that becomes normalized under the tenets of the National Security State.

Win, win big, win by any means, the NFL *is* America, and America, the NFL. Virtue resides in the Big Hit, harm inflicted on others, humiliating, as testimony to one's own power, all who stand in the way of self-defined rights of leadership, acting with impunity, the assertion of a domineering ego. Emerson put the interconnectedness, here, aggression on the field, militarism in the world, this way: the ocean is a large drop, a drop is a small ocean; its counterpart in US geopolitical thinking, the global framework is a large football field, a football field is a small global framework. Brute force, intimidation of bystanders, never apologizing, these are the dynamics of bullying, the habituation to violence in the microcosm promoting its execution in the macrocosm. Acquiescence, of victim and onlooker alike, is expected—in a political culture, insensitive to the needs of humanity, that values toughness above all (masking an emptiness of conscience and feeling), with respect for the individual deemed softness, a weakness to be overcome.

In the last week, enough has come out about Incognito (and teammates and fellow NFL players, in their response)—see, e.g., the *New York Times's* articles by Branch and Belson, 11-4-13, Rhoden, 11-5-13, and Macur, 11-10-13, all excellent, to see a pattern of authoritarianism at work based on deliberate cruelty, now, Jonathan Martin, but nameless rookies (he already in his second year) passing through the ringer, one of whose purposes being to give free reign to the cult of aggression, thence translated onto the field as the will to maim if not mangle the *enemy du jour*. The fans love it, giving them bragging rights to last through the week, rallying as a *Gemeinschaft*, not different in principle from the feelings of community solidarity aroused through intervention, drone attacks, placing and enforcing embargoes, talking tough to the Russians and Chinese, the extension of bullying, for which Obama has shown himself to be adept, from the locker-room to the world stage, from hazing the individual to militarily imposing America's will on market-entry, capital flows, political-economic-ideological formations deemed meeting US standards, hegemony on the 30-yard line to hegemony over several continents (if not also, outer space).

For our purposes, we can leave Incognito to Fox News and ESPN; my interest, rather, is Obama, poster boy #1 on the world scene for legitimated violence, bullying in the name of liberalism and humanitarian intervention, and therefore somehow pronounced kosher because of associations still held by the labels by which he surrounds himself. Just as the NFL will never see a house-cleaning on bullying and worse, neither will Obama, on assassination, regime change, paramilitary operations, fraudulent health care, favoritism to major banks, the list longer than a 45-yard field goal, with massive domestic surveillance and foreign eavesdropping the goal posts at either end. Just on the latest, over the last several days; the negotiations with Iran (which I have already written about in a previous *CP* article), but now, one step further along. Manifestly, Obama and Kerry are loath to give up their strategy of strangulation through economic boycotts, attempts at diplomatic isolation, and general all-around muscle flexing in the region.

The idea of an *interim* agreement of course allows the opposition forces to gather, a technique Obama has used time and again when what he actually sought was a conservative position from the start, using opposition as the rationale for a “pragmatic” solution. Health insurance, bank regulation, indeed, when running down the list, from climate change to gun control, the forward position was not even stated in the first place—practically nothing has been. As for Iran, the bullying ceases if at all one drop at a time, the US leading the charge whatever the G5+1 collectively wish. I would like to be surprised otherwise, but based on past performance one learns to expect little from Kerry and Obama, especially in this case, with Netanyahu and Lieberman looking over their shoulder and still implying unilateral action if the US, by their light, makes an unacceptable bargain.

My *New York Times* Comments on, first, the editorial, “Iran Nuclear talks—Unfinished but Alive,” (Nov. 12), and second, Roger Cohen’s article, “A Doable Iran Deal,” (Nov. 12), follow:

I

“The opponents of a deal are energized and determined.” Yes, but they ARE the US and its allies, who in fact are “united and smart”—but on what I conceive to be the wrong side. The US and Israel fear Iran, with or without the nuclear enrichment issue, itself a pretext for drastically reducing Iran’s power in the region. Iran under Rouhani poses a greater threat than his predecessor—for the last thing wanted is an Iran more democratic in spirit and substance.

With Iran demonized, the US and Israel can perpetuate a regional status quo of perpetual conflict, thereby allowing the former an unobstructed sphere of influence, the latter, a free hand in dealing with the Palestinians. Also, to US and Israeli liking, the Generals will remain free to exercise military control over Egypt and Syria can continue its mutual bloodletting, leaving that nation weakened and hurting.

Iran with Rouhani is the spoiler, a counterweight to the region’s reversion to pre-Arab Spring ways presently occurring. Among other things, a more democratic Iran undermines the Arab-phobia used to justify US counterterrorism. It is incumbent for the US, Israel its willing partner, to keep regional tensions alive as the linchpin for legitimating massive domestic surveillance (itself presumptive evidence of a totalitarian swing) and eavesdropping abroad, both of which are being pursued as a straightout global power play whether or not Iran even had a nuclear program. We are playing with fire.



## II

Well-crafted analysis: “seizing the moment” makes excellent sense. What Cohen may underestimate is the degree to which the US and Israel do NOT want a solution under any conditions. Geopolitical strategy here is founded on a scapegoat—Iran.

An increasingly democratized Iran under Rouhani and Zarif changes the Middle East power configuration, having the effect of applying pressure on Israel, Saudi Arabia, and, I should think, the Egyptian military, to moderate their respective yet contradictory policies, transcending the Shiite/Sunni conflict, toward popular aspirations in the region. Even Syria would be affected, the successful negotiation on Iran becoming precedent for Syrian reconciliation.

Instead, the US, with its sanctions regime, has sought to cripple Iran (with or without the nuclear issue), as the precondition for America’s undisputed claim to creating a Middle East sphere of influence in order to counter Russia in the region AND have a backdoor means (the front-door being Obama’s Pacific-first strategy) of containing China. Israel, riding US coattails, would have a free hand, via reducing Iran’s power, to pursue its punitive Palestinian policy.

Even were an interim agreement reached, the US and Israel are determined to humiliate Iran in any way possible, to destroy its chances for final settlement. An independent Iran throws a wrench into the far-too-bold aspiration for hegemony of each, Israel, the region, the US, the Far East in general.

NOVEMBER 15, 2013

### **The Tanking of Liberalism**

Let POTUS henceforth be known by his correct designation, S.A.E., “S” for surveillance, “A” for assassination, “E” for eavesdropping, an indelible legacy, no matter what follows in his second term, and from all indications, his militarism abroad, and degradation of the poor at home, can only get worse. The US is reeling, self-devoured in its own juices, a structural-ideological mix of corporatism, hierarchy, and—far beyond John Winthrop’s wildest dreams – exceptionalism. Leviathan is becoming brittle, nay, ossified, old before its time, likened to an Alzheimer patient who can no longer remember the glory days when democratic values were taken seriously, when workers proudly struggled for their own and the rights of all, where hegemony was not a universally accepted national value. I think of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, Paul Robeson singing at Peekskill, the three civil-rights workers murdered at Philadelphia, Mississippi—defeats, yet in reality victories, when Americans still could and did stand for universal human rights, a nation still with prospects for hope, because its citizenry, albeit a minority, were able to distinguish right from wrong.

Now instead, the great melding into Reaction, liberals indistinguishable from conservatives, together a somewhat bland incipient fascism, characterized by business-banking growth, consolidation, and ever-greater political influence at home—the State it is *moi* (monopoly capitalism), for what and why else is government established?—and battleships, carrier groups, strategic bombers, paramilitary forces, armed drones, JSOC and CIA units globetrotting in search of

regime change, all (and more!) in a last-ditch effort to remain at the top of the international power pyramid. Obama here is the quintessential liberal of modern times: devious, enthralled by prospects of continued world domination (of course, to bring democracy to the benighted masses struggling to be free, American-style), a reverential attitude toward power itself and as the corporeality realized in US business and military leaders, and prostrate in worship before Great Wealth. Liberalism, the heavily-rouged face of corporatism, adds flair and vigor to an increasingly widening system of class differentiation by its inclusion of military prowess to provide the dash and thrill of intervention, expansion, market-penetration, and obliteration of the “terrorist,” real or supposed, via missiles guided from 8,000 miles away—in sum, to also provide *distraction* from the pillaging of the Republic.

Yesterday, a Warhol painting sold in excess of \$100M (a Francis Bacon triptych for considerably more)—the devolution of culture? Much worse, a process of wealth-concentration at the societal core which promises further militarism so that it might continue unabated. The race to the bottom, usually thought of as corporate behavior—outsourcing—to achieve the lowest labor costs, has its analogy in reducing the US political culture itself to the lowest moral level: a depersonalization not only of the victims here and overseas, but also the process of unrestricted wealth accumulation (no questions tolerated or even asked), obstacles, both human and governmental, to this process summarily run roughshod over in the self-justification of wealth at the apex of the moral-ideological system. Poor Warhol, a babe-in-the-woods, from the standpoint of milking and/or serving the broader framework of capitalism, compared with Team Obama, Clapper, Brennan, Rhodes, Rice, all vying for the president’s attention in pursuit of systemic rejuvenation through slash-and-burn tactics and the amassing of overwhelming force, less to counter terrorism than to confront and contain China, check Russian influence in the Middle East, bring the EU closer within the US trade-and-financial orbit, and reestablish America’s world supremacy as its economic foundations, meanwhile, gradually erode.

Nothing is coming out right, largely because a complicit populace takes it on the chin as government and business continue their tango of aggrandizement, business, its massiveness and cumulative hold, thanks to deregulation, on policy-making as well as the people’s consciousness, government, anxious as always to identify with capitalism and please its leaders, going the extra mile to ward off domestic criticism of business operations, however productive of inequality, waste, shoddiness, and worse, while viewing the monopolistic base as the ideal economic groundwork for mounting an expansionist foreign policy. The tango, partnership for an integrated political-military complex advancing capitalism both at home and abroad, speaks to the existence of a unified structure, the *interpenetration* one the other of two parallel power formations, inseparable in their commitment to class rule and to promoting the interests of each, the strengthening alike of capitalism and the State. In America, their mutual dependence provides the united front against radicalism—or even authentic welfare measures still within capitalism. The current case in point is Obamacare, government as midwife to health insurers’ gross profitability. Measured by the standards of other advanced industrial nations, this does not even meet the betrayal-of-the-public test, so fraudulent its provisions and workings.

What we refuse to admit or to learn is that public policy (including, necessarily, foreign policy) forms a coherent and consistent whole. Fakery on health care does not hold promise for efficacious action on, say, climate change, gun control, job creation, mortgage protection, etc., because the

motivation and receptivity to class- and power-arrangements is the same, the placation of, and support for, capitalist interests at the highest levels of wealth and structural concentration, no matter the particular issue at stake. Moreover, how expect constructive action on health care, when the selfsame USG and POTUS vaporize individuals in Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere, promiscuously spy on Americans at home, in obvious contempt for civil liberties and rule of law, or eavesdrop on foreign leaders, in utter disregard of international standards of privacy and sovereignty? Manipulative, sure, treacherous and deceitful, keep talking, no end to political-economic dishonesty at its deepest level, *yet* we are asked to believe in the virtues of Obamacare, as though a step toward the authentic democratization of the social safety net, as meanwhile that social safety net is being gutted on the altar of military expenditures.

My *New York Times* Comment on Stolberg and Craig's article, "Health Enrollment Figures Far Lower than Initial Estimates" (Nov. 13, though Comments expunged, no reason given, hours after first appearance) follows:

Obamacare is an abomination. Obama gave away the store even before passage, a gutless performance that makes one suspect he never intended other than a giveaway to the vested interests, chiefly, health insurers. In the W.H. Health Summit, attendees were carefully chosen, dissident views plainly unwelcome. Of course Obama would not accept single-payer, but why reject, as he did, the public option?

Present troubles are a good thing, if they reveal the administration's pattern of deceit. Health care is not alone—every policy area, from civil liberties to climate change to bank regulation, is a disgrace, Democrats shifting blame to Republicans to cover their own cowardice and conservatism.

Obamacare is not his signature achievement (bad as that is); rather, SAE are: surveillance, assassination, eavesdropping. With a record like that, why expect the health-care plan to be other than a cruel imposture? The nation gets what it deserves, in this case, taxpayer subsidies to the insurance companies, as meanwhile, the people by and large remain unprotected.

NOVEMBER 19, 2013

### **American-Israeli Obstructionism**

It was not always so—presently, America thrives on war, the preparation for war, the militarization of the national consciousness (and the political economy of advanced capitalism, of which it is a part), as though intuitively recognizing that in no other way can the US maintain its position of global leadership in an increasingly multipolar world-power system. Leadership here refers to, not the paragon of moral virtue, beacon to the world championing human rights, but quite the opposite, unilateralism, vehicle for the expansion and security of a capitalistic system which has seen better days and is now witnessing the atrophy of manufacturing, the utter scurrilousness of market behavior, the growing disparities in wealth, income, power, reflected in bubbles, unemployment, foreclosures, hardship, in sum, a system in decline in spite of, or even because of, its military power.

The historical-structural context for America has all of the makings of a society, fearing the loss of its supremacy, which is willing to bring the world down with it, contrariwise, the grand assertion

of hegemony, via the narrowing focus on militarism, to sustain the no-longer sustainable: global political-economic-financial-cultural-ideological dominance in the face of all comers, notably, China, but also an EU restive under US influence, a reawakening Russia, Brazil, exemplifying the industrial potential of formerly Third World economies and regional power-centers, and, of course, Japan, India, and the Far East in general as Obama's capitalist area of expansion of choice (the Pacific-first strategy, as in days of yore, as the presumed future for successful market penetration).

Poor Iran, easily lost sight of in America's cosmic framework of Superpowerdom, except for one thing: the Empire's consolidation is only as good as the nitty-gritty details shaping its content, all of which must necessarily pull in the same direction. Not surprisingly, the term "credibility" is on everyone's lips of the national-security establishment, POTUS on down. Give an inch, and the Giant evaporates into thin air, or, as is the case with the victims of Obama's drone attacks, becomes a blood splat. This must not be allowed to happen on his watch, the guiding assumption from the Cold War years on and given special recognition with Vietnam in the more articulated versions of the falling-domino theory. That is precisely where Iran is now, in the cross-hairs of a geopolitical strategy in which any loss is held non-negotiable. If Iran falls, the sphere of influence America has carved out in the Middle East is endangered, and with it, beyond Israel's protection, support for Egypt's military rule and arrest of the autonomous strivings of the Arab Spring—the region a test case, as also in Latin America, of the US posture of counterrevolution wherever potential democratization rears its supposed ugly head.

The dynamics of the domino-effect become unstoppable: as the Middle East goes (assuming America fails in its effort to isolate and contain Iran), every other region is in danger of shucking off US power and influence, a particularly alarming state of action as American capitalism, exhibiting problems of its own, finds that its defense sector, ever enlarging, is becoming an insufferable burden (yet one gladly accepted because existing in tandem with the shrinkage and weakening of the social safety net—a sought-for goal in reinforcement of capitalist tendencies in America). From maintenance of the domino theory abroad to its implementation at home comprises a unitary psychological cluster: the existing class system must not be upset nor that of its ideological underpinnings, else the deferential treatment of wealth and the wealthy goes out the window, and with it, the widespread deregulation of a monopolistic business-and-banking structure and the social policies keeping in place a to all intents and purposes underclass as well as obfuscatory political consciousness.

Of course, not having our way in Iran will not inaugurate an end-of-times scenario. But the darkness of the foreboding, really the psychopathology of hegemony, in which each step becomes an all-or-nothing proposition, guides the American policy-making mindset (and has for some time, making for a bipartisan similitude and continuity in all matters of fundamental importance). Here Sec. Kerry can be depended on to add last-minute demands which torpedo the negotiations, which the Lavrov news conference in Cairo this week appears to bear out, and which Israel is determined to ensure through applying pressure on POTUS and Congress. As I wrote earlier, the interim nature of the agreement sought is a sure way of providing breathing space for the buildup of opposition, and that the quid pro quo of reducing selected elements of the sanctions regime is also a sure way, here of rubbing salt in the wounds of an illegal act in the first place. Sanctions equal bullying. An honorable settlement is not wanted, and rather, a one-sided victory, making the Iranians eat crow.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial deploring the piling on of further sanctions (Nov. 16) follows:

Israel is leading America by the nose. The editorial's basic point is the matter of blowback: failure of negotiations will lead to unraveling the sanctions regime, in turn creating divisions among the G5+1. Obama and Netanyahu prefer stalemate, as vindication of the hawkish posture. In the long-term, US-Israeli intransigence is perhaps a good thing, from the standpoint of world peace, because it will result in checking US unilateral global power, its implied militarism, and penchant for intervention.

Once again, FM Lavrov of Russia, as in preventing American bombing in Syria, has exposed US actions extremely damaging to itself (as well as the intended victim) before the world community. Obama-Netanyahu wouldn't know DIPLOMACY if it hit them face-on. Only war, power, hurting others—for the sanctions indeed hurt and impoverish people, not governments, and therefore should be thought war crimes.

G5+1, as a mini-Security Council, reveals here the extent of America's flirting with fragmentation of international politics, all to what end? "Hegemony," granted, is an overworked word, but a correct one, with Obama personally authorizing assassination via drone warfare, and mounting a military show of force in confrontation with China.

Iran in all of this is a sideshow given prominence, because failure to win on this, the US fears, will in domino-theory fashion, diminish US power globally. Hence, tough-it out, at the risk of becoming a pariah nation.

NOVEMBER 21, 2013

### **Empire Deconstructed**

Every day brings evidence of an untoward kind, a polite way of saying, the realities are piling up, whichever way one looks, of America's downward projection into a class-state of concentrated wealth and power buttressed by a military establishment and accompanying weakening of constitutional rights, all with the result that global hegemony—the sun never sets on an American military installation—is seen as the means of staving off systemic failures in a market-fundamentalism, bred-in-the-bones, US capitalism. Militarism becomes the surrogate for, and life belt holding up, continued economic growth, in which the absolutism of the property right trumps the many phases of internal democratization which affect, and here, instead, derogate from, the people's well-being.

From health care to environmental protection, from privacy to educational opportunity and excellence, and the list continues on into the night, government, rather than representing the public interest and dedicated to the general welfare, is the third rail to the war machine and Wall Street, energizing both—indeed, integrating both as in the militarization-financialization of capitalism itself, an obvious bastardization of Adam Smith, which called for a rounded framework of industry and commerce in a stable, even-handed international politics and system, yet ideally suited to the un-Smithian quest and paradigm of capitalist development founded on unilateral dominance across the board, whether by fair means or foul.

Now, mostly foul. American capitalism has become inseparable from intervention, the tip of whose iceberg is drone assassination selected and ordered by POTUS. When the chief executive resorts to premeditated killing, massive surveillance, eavesdropping on world leaders, trading partnerships one-sided in character, it is evident that *this* capitalist formation is growing desperate, cynical, yes, senile, fearing the loss of power and place, bragging rights to global leadership, and, to remain solvent, backing into the posture of counterrevolution and permanent war. Capitalism, once upon a time, was about trade, but now, isolation and containment of supposed adversaries (China, and soon the hitherto Third World rapidly developing), with Obama's Pacific-first strategy and secretive Trans-Pacific Partnership key signs of a confrontational attitude, using terrorism as a crutch, to maintain ascendancy of the capitalist world—as itself the only legitimate one. To remain on top of capitalism is to deny, rule out, if needed, strangle, alternative modes, chiefly socialism, with even mixed economies running afoul of World Bank and IMF (both largely extensions of US policy) injunctions.

Today, spinal meningitis at Princeton, a rare form, which Swiss medication, not US-approved, may or may not successfully address, while Cuban medicine has produced a vaccine specifically directed to this type B meningococcal meningitis (see W.F. Whitney's excellent article in *CP*, Nov. 18) but is kept out of reach because of the embargo on Cuban imports, illustrates the fanaticism of America, its capitalism, its fear, surely not of Cuba itself, but what Cuba represents, an alternative life form to the rigidified society and its institutions America has become, the Princeton students hostage to the unreasoning hatred of whatever holds the nation up to the mirror of reason and social decency. One small item in the news, but it is just such, which by their very presence, alerts us to the prevalence of social decay. There are many others.

Here are two examples, *CP* readers perhaps wondering why I include my Comments to the *New York Times* in these articles. They serve as triggers for further thought, and often contain inchoative formulations without which I could not extend the analysis. By quotidian signs of structural-political decline, I mean exactly that: daily evidences, straws in the wind if one likes, of what I take to be the makings of fascistization in America.

The first NYT Comment is to Roger Cohen's article, "A Dangerous Interregnum," Nov. 19, which, since I harbor few illusions about The Times (except for its strong national-security and financial investigative reporting) is all the more surprising. Not many columnists begin with a salient quote of Antonio Gramsci, which sets the tenor for the piece: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of *morbid symptoms* appear." (Italics, mine) Exactly the morbidity I find running through practically every aspect of public policy, including a second area, massive domestic surveillance. Thus, Adam Liptak and Jeremy Peters's article, "Congress and Courts Weigh Restraints on N.S.A. Spying," Nov. 18, which, to NYT's credit, has kept surveillance in the spotlight. From different angles, we see a developing pattern hardly worthy of a democratic nation:

I

A rare treat: cogent philosophical analysis of a high standard in a Times op-ed. I felt Walter Lippmann was resurrected when we need him most. Interregnum, as though a global suspension of political-economic animation, seems accurate, except that the US, opinion polls showing Americans' overwhelming preference for focusing on domestic rather than foreign policy notwithstanding, is loathe to surrender visions of world hegemony, and that, gained not through superior trade but through a massive military posture.

The world is tired, but the US sees this condition as an opportunity, perhaps like never before, to EXPAND its ideological influence and, equally, give its capitalism a chance for revitalization amid signs of structural decline (esp. compared with China) and societal decay.

Under Obama, the logical culmination of six decades of bipartisan intervention and somewhat ruthless market-penetration, we see a militarily overextended giant finally bearing the physical and moral costs of its outsize ambitions: a wasteland of widening class difference, a health-care system choking on its dedication to profit and privatization, banking with all of the grace of mobster-run casinos, and the social safety net springing more holes through which the citizenry's needs remain unattended than in any other advanced economy.

Will “think[ing] anew about changed power structures” come about before it is too late, i.e., before the US brings the rest of the world to its knees, I doubt it.

## II

The moral bankruptcy of the American political system, viz., bipartisan leadership consensus on massive surveillance (hallmark of totalitarianism), is nowhere more evident than here. Surveillance, antithesis of democracy, goes hand-in-glove with international eavesdropping, and suggests a degree of social control under Obama unprecedented in US history. Drone assassination is ugly enough, but NSA's carte blanche for spying and a willing American public to that outrage indicate a power-hungry government which will stoop to any practice conducive to global hegemony and support of mega-corporations and -banks.

Civil liberties is a dead letter. Everything is secret. In the name of the National Security State, the Constitution becomes so much toilet paper. Perhaps the real terrorists are POTUS, his security advisers, the intelligence community, and the bulk membership of both parties. They have done more harm to American freedom than al Qaeda could possibly achieve, because the canker lies within, prerequisite to growing repression.

How liberals/progressives can still support Obama passes belief. It is difficult to imagine worse to come, so vicious are the domestic practices done under the name of counterterrorism, and whose corollaries are intervention, paramilitary operations on a global scale, and a military budget sucking out the vitals of the Republic.

NOVEMBER 29, 2013

### **Diplomacy via B52s**

China's air defense identification zone is all the rage in US national-security discussions and planning, a true godsend because furnishing pretext for heightening and accelerating the American geopolitical project embedded in the doctrine and being executed in the now-visible and already-famous *pivot* of military “assets” to the Pacific theater-of-war—yes, that, if carrier battle groups, long-range bombers, military alliances and joint maneuvers in the region mean anything at all. POTUS and his new Secretary of State are busy, scouring the globe for real and potential opposition to continued American political-economic-military-ideological hegemony, a task made difficult by the fact that American capitalism is slipping internally while the international structure of power is changing beyond US control into a multipolar framework and the resulting dispersal of power so that unilateralism is no longer possible.

The Middle East is a sideshow to the real scene of action: CHINA. Toughness with respect to Iran (the US, despite a show of negotiation, will continue to generate roadblocks to a settlement, thereby maintaining intact its alliance system with “friends and allies,” including the overlooking of

Egyptian atrocities) is intended as an object-lesson to the world as to American military virility. Yet, not entirely a sideshow, and more a base of operations which, nailed-down as a secure sphere of influence, allows the US the staging area for exerting pressure, part of Pacific-first, on China from the other side—a giant vise, on land, west to east, by sea, east to west, with suitable military bases for support, along with naval power, for mounting a pincer-like movement or formation. To what end? Even the vulturish national-security team doesn't seem to know.

Burnishing predatory credentials, stoking the fires of huge defense expenditures, keeping in the foreground counterterrorism as a way of forging trade-partnerships across both oceans while simultaneously using massive surveillance at home to serve ultimately as the chilling of dissent, these all have a part to play in the power move toward China. But at rock-bottom, China is being cast as The Enemy, *a la* vintage Cold War mentality, both to preserve American global hegemony and, now more than previously, hide the evidences of US capitalism's decline—decline at the hands of two self-created systemic trends: the financialization and militarization of capitalism, one the distortion that is eroding manufacturing capacity and capability, the other, the vast overextension of resources at home and belligerent accompaniment of market-penetration abroad.

First then, down to specifics in the last few days. Tania Branigan, writing from Beijing in the *Guardian* (Nov. 27), begins: "The open challenge by the US to China's new air defence zone over the East China Sea was met by muted response in Beijing, as China faced growing resistance to its attempt to extend its authority in the region." My query: Is China's attempt to extend its regional authority (i.e., sovereignty over the disputed Senaku or Diaoyu islands with Japan) the real issue, or, as I believe, are both the Abe government's re-militarizing of Japan in violation of its Constitution and Obama's military deployment of forces to the Pacific primarily responsible for its actions?

Provocation lies largely on one side, as I'll try to show, with these islands merely chess pieces on a board—threatening major conflagration—on which not only China and Japan are players, but also, complicating matters, the US and South Korea, with other nations, India, North Korea, possibly sucked in, and, if war should break out, impossible to escape.

The two B52s flying through the zone were obviously testing China's will (and illustrated the practicality of round-trip missions from Guam, where their flight originated), unarmed, for this occasion, yet making the point that courtesy had no place, i.e., the failure to identify themselves, customary in crossing such zones. There was "no attempted contact" by the Chinese military. Immediately, Australia jumped in, as though by prearrangement, and called in China's ambassador "to voice its concerns."

Psaki, US State's spokesperson, might have been looking in the mirror when she charged that China's complaint would "raise regional tensions and increase the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents"—the very things American battleships, aircraft carriers, B52s, incitement of Japan to rearm, US-Philippine joint-maneuvers, were actually accomplishing. The White House called the zone "unnecessarily inflammatory," a theme picked up by the think tanks, along with the charge that Xi Jinping was using the zone as a diversion to hide the Communist Party's lackluster economic performance.

Here Branigan adds, China is counting intrusions to its zone just as Japan is, to its zone, and further, the salient admission which should have come earlier: "China's weekend announcement may also be in part a response to Japan's *extension of its own zone this spring* and its recent



warning that it was willing to shoot down unmanned drones it regarded as a threat to its airspace.” (Italics, mine) The article hints in conclusion that entering the zone may have to do with cyberespionage. From the People’s Daily, she paraphrases the views of Li Jie that “US flights sought to test China’s reaction, to discourage future interference as it continued [a direct quote] ‘reconnaissance, patrolling, and spying on Chinese information....’” A not unfounded assumption, in light of NSA operations elsewhere.

Next, I should like to present important background documentation which makes intelligible the Chinese response to what can be termed (and perceived as such by them, from credible evidence of the Pacific-first strategy in operation) US-inspired isolation, encirclement, and containment of China, assuming the form increasingly of utilizing military means, in conjunction primarily with Japan and, despite its enmity toward Japan for World War II atrocities, including the sexual enslavement of its women, South Korea.

I refer to the US State Department’s communiqué, “Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee: Toward a More Robust Alliance and Greater Shared Responsibilities,” issued Oct. 3, 2013, signed by Kerry, Hagel, at Defense, and their Japanese counterparts, respectively, Kashida and Onodera. In sum, this is the paradigm of American encouragement of Japan’s rearmament, a bilateral agreement expressing the common purpose of Obama and Abe that a “robust” (I shudder whenever I see the word, usually in a military context) position toward China be undertaken, codified to every jot and tittle even including the acquisition and employment of military hardware.

Although there was an earlier warning, in the memoirs of a Japanese former defense official, that the US was seeking to encourage, expressly in violation of Japan’s Constitution, the construction of a nuclear weapon (specifically with China the designated enemy), the present Joint Statement, non-nuclear to be sure, nevertheless is fully intended to put Japan on a war-footing, indeed, conceptualizes a US-Japan Far East, with China odd-man-out, a partnership being projected every bit as close (yet like so much about the Obama administration, kept largely secretive) as with NATO.

The Joint Statement, identifying the signatories, begins: “On the occasion of this historic meeting, the SCC [Security Consultative Committee] reaffirmed the indispensable role our two countries play in the maintenance of international peace and security and reconfirmed the Alliance’s commitment to the security of Japan *through the full range of U.S. military capabilities, including nuclear and conventional.*” (Italics, mine) This was no ordinary agreement, if the nuclear umbrella means anything at all. The succeeding flourish, tacitly linking free markets with social democracy, and implicitly, excluding China from the bounteous prosperity to come (the Trans-Pacific Partnership in fact excludes China from membership): “The two sides also set forth a strategic vision that, reflecting our shared values of democracy, the rule of law, free and open markets, and respect for human rights, will effectively promote peace, security, stability and economic prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.”

This is a heady brew, especially for a military document; the “shared values” appear ill-fitting in drawing the two powers together, given Abe’s strident nationalism (with its strong element of militarism) and the paean to free and open markets—or perhaps not so strange, the militarism-markets nexus tightly drawn in US alliance-building, actually inseparable where there is resistance to market-penetration. However, it is the “evolving security environment” (itself not a stranger to

market considerations) which draws Kerry & Company's notice, the need for taking "several steps to upgrade significantly the capability of the U.S.-Japan Alliance"—gobbledygook, repeated ad infinitum throughout the document, for absorbing Japan within a military partnership, and extended to subsequently wider alliance systems, where the commonly used term "regional" is code for the China threat/menace.

The US casts itself as the cheerleader for Japan's now-awakening military propensities under Abe, but given his election and presumed popularity, and US pressures in this direction, one finds that America's urgings on Japan go back, I surmise, at least two decades, meaning, Obama, as in so much else, is carrying forward and *intensifying* the policies of his predecessors, and that Abe's own election can be attributed to a residual militarism in influential quarters (and possibly the broader electorate) to account for his actions.

Thus it continues, "Our strategic vision for a more robust Alliance and greater *shared* responsibilities is to be based on...[the upward revision of previous guidelines for] Defense Cooperation, expanding security and defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region *and beyond*, and approving new measures that support the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. The United States also welcomed Japan's determination to contribute more *proactively* to regional peace and security. The Ministers stressed the importance of *multilateral cooperation with regional and international partners*." (Italics, mine) I can already see the naval cadets marching in review (as in a recent BBC clip) and, as we note momentarily from the document, the war-planning apparatus (copying that of the US) installed in place. Through US involvement Japan is experiencing a long-term attitudinal change, China serving as scapegoat igniting forbidden thoughts in the wake of World War II of hegemonic influence.

I am frankly surprised at the agreed-upon formalization of design and purpose, a societal transformation for Japan, a willing partner for the military-expansionist aspirations of the US, as though, here, the Far East would become a joint-protectorate, excluding and at the expense of China, a policy trend occurring for some time, until now, under the radar, and making the region, insofar as acute tension is concerned, another Middle East, with Japan the New Israel, possibly even more-joined-at-the-hip than the original. The acknowledgment of the pivot is straightforward: "As the United State continues to implement its rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region it intends to strengthen military capabilities that allow our Alliance to respond to future global and regional security challenges, including in emerging strategic domains such as space and cyberspace."

What security challenges? Hardly North Korea, or for that matter, India; only China is the prime candidate. With this alignment, war is peace: "Japan's security policy continues to reflect its long-standing commitment to regional and global peace and stability, as well as its intentions *to make more proactive contributions* to addressing the challenges faced by the international community. At the same time, Japan will continue *coordinating closely* with the United States *to expand its role within the framework* of the U.S.-Japan Alliance." (Italics, mine)

Like "robust," the term "proactive" makes one want to seek cover, particularly when doing the business of the international community (aka, EU, NATO, etc.) is involved; but more important, the supposed granting of equal standing in the partnership (coordinating closely, expanding its role) further attaches Japan as an appendage to America's confrontation with China (like "our partners")

first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan). I promised the nitty-gritty: “Japan is also preparing to establish its National Security Council and to issue its National Security Strategy.”

These, of course, have a single intended purpose, and peace is not it. Immediately succeeding, the document refers obliquely to the necessity to amend the Constitution, so that military preparation is legitimated: “In addition, it is re-examining the legal basis for its security including the matter of exercising *its right of collective self-defense*, expanding its defense budget, reviewing its National Defense Program Guidelines, strengthening its capability to defend its sovereign territory, and broadening *regional contributions*, including capacity-building efforts vis-à-vis Southeast Asian countries.” (Italics, mine) This meticulous list leaves little more to be desired, confirming (one wonders if the Japanese public is in the dark as much as the American, about this war-provoking readiness and the consequences for the domestic political-social agenda and international obligations under the agreement) the cumulating state of Japan’s militarism, subjoined to America’s own geopolitical priorities.

The US is taking no chances, in for the pound not for the penny (projecting the same decade-long time span as Obama’s 2024 plan for US forces in Afghanistan), and taking for the close coordination of forces a still closer condition, an “interoperable...force posture,” between, among, in the midst—in sum, hand-in-hand marching toward the glories of empire, or at least seeking mutual advantage and possibly more in the international system. Hence, “To accomplish our *shared strategic vision* for the Alliance against the backdrop of a complex regional security environment, the Ministers recognized that the Alliance is the cornerstone of peace and security in the region. Over the next decade, the Alliance intends to continue to address security challenges through close cooperation and a more interoperable and flexible force posture that enables side-by-side and agile contingency response and *crisis management*.” (Italics, mine)

The jargon is compelling, from “the cornerstone of peace and security in the region,” hubristic and grandiose in tone, China now left out, to, if not the Halls of Montezuma or the Shores of Tripoli, then, addressing security challenges by means of an agile contingency response, we have a partially-coded exhortation to once again militarize and join the club—entirely with America’s approval: “The United States welcomed these efforts and reiterated its commitment to collaborate closely with Japan.”

Not to be outdone, the document’s overview concludes: “The United States and Japan resolve to be full partners in a more balanced and effective Alliance in which the two countries can jointly and ably rise to meet the regional and global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by investing in cutting-edge capabilities, improving interoperability, *modernizing force structures*, and adapting Alliance roles and missions to meet contemporary and future security realities. To this end, our Alliance should emphasize improved cooperation and coordination, including information security equipment and technology, cyber security, and space security, in order to broaden and deepen cooperation across *a wide range* of Alliance issues.” (Italics, mine) This, only the overview—the document has numerous sections implemental in character, from removing the 3,000 Marines from Okinawa (for reasons not printable in polite circles) to new and replacement squadrons for beefing up military capacity and capability.

My *New York Times* Comment on Thom Shanker's article, "U.S. Sends Two B-52 Bombers Into Air Zone Claimed by China" (Nov. 27), an even-handed account, although with emphasis on the two disputed islands, to the background and flyover incident I have been describing, follows:

This is not Xi vs. Abe, still less, some desolate islands where only goats roam, this is geopolitics big time, with, yes, the pivot doing what Obama and his national security advisers want: to provoke a confrontation with China. It has been in the works for some time, symptomatic of the US realization that it is no longer exclusively #1 in global political-economic affairs, and must begin to share its power with others in, now, a multipolar world, including China, Russia, Brazil, and, anxious to return to its militaristic ways, and therefore a fit partner for America in the Pacific, Japan.

We would not see China's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) were it not for Obama's military build-up in Asia, the Pacific-first strategy (aka rebalance) designed to—what? Unclear, because the utter destruction of China—now Obama's new obsession, along with that of his Strangelovian friends—seems beyond US capability, but certainly, pen it in, humiliate it, bully it, tighten military alliances surrounding it. Drone assassination nearby doesn't seem to appease Obama's appetite, nor does 2024 in Afghanistan, both of which are part of the China-containment policy. Nothing less than Asia as an American sphere of influence, the dumping ground of US commercial penetration, the cheap workshop for outsourced American industry, and expansion for its own sake, all prerequisites to returning the US to a position of unilateral world hegemony.

DECEMBER 3, 2013

### **Juggernaut of Deceit**

Every day brings a new outrage. Obama in the saddle is like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rolled into one. Several articles and editorials, which appeared over the last week or so in the *New York Times*, called attention indirectly (regrettably, The Times, in its editorial policy, never indicts Obama, however decisive and damaging its investigative reporting) to separate yet *interrelated problems*, their connective tissue the administration's leaning in a totalitarian direction. Even then, the coverage still only scratches the surface of his perfidious record and nature.

First, the sequence of policies, e.g., health care in its evolution and present form, raises the prospect, even in the near-term, of the *privatization* of Social Security, an outcome already stamped heavily across the face of Obamacare and in the ambient surroundings of deregulation, inherited from Clinton, Rubin, Summers—the wrecking team via financial-and-banking libertarianism of the America and also global economy. Paul Krugman, administration-cloned, nevertheless finds some danger in the possible (and all but presumed) assault on the system. Privatization challenges the entire social safety net; corporate welfare trumps public welfare, from health insurers to pharmaceuticals, to the widening of class divisions, as rewards flow upward, poverty downward. Here, my *New York Times* Comment (Nov. 22) on Krugman's article, "Social Security Expansion," his criticism a step in the right direction, yet within the narrowed tunnel-vision of administration liberalism:

Social security expansion raises the ideological challenge and/or fear that respect for working people and esp. the poor is a sign of weakness. Capitalism must be muscular, hardened, militarized, with outsize rewards to the titans of banking and defense, for whom we owe our safety and security in a world of impending chaos and terrorism.

In sum, social security = communistic subversion. As a nation we have forfeited any claim or pretense to democracy and moral worth. Instead, intervention, POTUS-authorized assassination, an over-the-top defense budget, not only for its own sake, but deliberately as a way of negating the social safety net.

As advanced nations go, America is a sick joke—not only social security but also health care, and beyond that core of civilized moral obligation, paralysis on climate change, a crumbling infrastructure, a vibrant educational system, honest banking regulation, the list goes on. Social security is a litmus test for a society's responsive to its people. And now the people themselves are complicit in their own degradation—all to what end? More Stealth bomber flyovers at football games, more swelling with pride at the slaughter of innocents abroad, more surveillance at home, eavesdropping abroad. No sir-ee, the US will remain on top of the world pile, even if that means going to the mat with China, as in Obama's Pacific-first strategy, military build-up in the Pacific, and, for good measure, the Trans-Pacific Partnership absent China.

Nothing stops Obama. His secretive trade negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership is one example of his leadership, in procedure, a disdain, bordering on contempt, for transparency in government, and in content, a trade architecture ensuring one-sided US advantages which at the same time prevent the use of antitrust proceedings at home (as violations of the agreement itself). Business and banking never had a better friend, hegemony being advanced under the banner of liberalism. But I cite this only by way of suggesting a consistent pattern of leadership, here, presently in the news, concerning the Afghan negotiations, which would leave in place a US military presence until 2024. Can Karzai, himself hardly the model of democratic statesman, hold off the Obama war machine, for even he sees the injustice and blowback possibilities of allowing US troops and private contractors immunity from criminal prosecution for crimes committed in his country against his people. The Times, Nov. 29, had an op-ed article by two Brookings "experts" on how ungrateful Karzai is for US intervention; meanwhile, Karzai, to his credit, is digging in his heels on a number of abusive American practices, from night-time forcible entry into private homes to drone attacks which have killed civilians, including, at this writing, one child. These practices provide an excellent illustration of Obama's disregard of civil liberties and rule of law.

My NYT Comment (Nov. 22) for Roger Cohen's article, "Leadership Not Like Earlier Times," follows:

Eloquent—and timely. When Cohen speaks of "managed commodities," surely one thinks of Obama, "a tiptoeing president," who lacks all moral courage, esp. with respect to Afghanistan. US troops through 2024? A cynical, nihilistic nightmare!

Obama would never apologize for US intervention and enormous human casualties in that country, an intervention w/o justification by any standard. Nor would he accept a status of forces agreement in which US personnel would be held responsible in local courts for crimes committed by them. As for night home invasion, ditto. POTUS personally selects

targets and authorizes their assassination. America is hitting rock-bottom in its commission of war crimes, while the public either apathetically or with resounding cheers looks on.

Karzai is undoubtedly corrupt, but at least he has the gumption to stand up, even if only for the moment, to US power maneuvers. Again, 2024: what a disgrace.

Privatization, secretiveness, next, the international posture of toughness: Here we see a seeming break in US global militarization, specifically, the Geneva negotiations with Iran leading to an interim agreement centered on controlling nuclear enrichment levels and otherwise halting steps which might lead to the creation of a bomb. No writer likes to backtrack and admit to overstatement. But events take precedence over analysis, when modification of the latter demands.

Prior to, say, November 21, one finds—and I stand by this, correct to that point—a sanctions-regime, its bearing on the success of Iranian negotiations over the nuclear-power and-enrichment issues, in which the US, with the support, willing and otherwise, of “friends and allies” to isolate Iran and cripple its economy, is operating on several levels. It seeks to stabilize power-relations in the Middle East in a way that checks the democratizing potential of the Arab Spring; the heavy-handed treatment of Iran has the effect indirectly of buttressing the military rule in Egypt. By demonstrating the iron fist, it serves also to pacify mass yearnings elsewhere, i.e., Palestinians. Meanwhile, verbal differences over Iranian policy notwithstanding, the US continues to have Israel’s back in all ways, thus encouraging its siege-mentality and superiority complex in the region. Even with the newly-reached interim agreement, and despite PM Netanyahu’s dire warnings and threats (Israel still reserves to itself the right to take action, i.e., bomb Iranian nuclear facilities, going it alone if necessary), the foregoing holds—keeping Israel’s back, as well as tacit approval of the Egyptian Generals and disapproval of the democratizing potential of the Arab Spring.

What also has not changed, as I wrote pre-interim settlement, is that, agreement or not, America has a larger geostrategic position which goes beyond Iran per se, whatever that outcome might be, i.e., Iran as enemy, the pretext for a tough sanctions regime, or Iran as accommodated within the regional context, and a partial relaxation of sanctions. For the US covets a still more pronounced sphere of influence in the Middle East (here, oil is too obvious an explanation, although just as obviously it is a matter of high priority) in order to continue the wider encirclement of China, at play already in the Pacific-first strategy and Trans-Pacific Partnership. Iran may not have the power to be a spoiler of this geopolitical-military paradigm, but, coming into its own, it would not kneel at Leviathan’s feet. Like Cuba, which also has to contend with a sanctions-regime, Iran sticks in America’s craw precisely because it poses an ideological challenge to US hegemony—the ideology of standing up straight and not flinching.

Yet, now with the interim agreement, the US has skillfully neutralized, or is in the process of doing so, Iran’s role as *impediment* to its global aspirations vis-à-vis China, and at the same time, by reaching a temporary accord with Iran, making possible more direct American regional penetration so that the Middle East becomes a base of operations in confronting China west to east. In reality, US hostility to Iran hasn’t changed overnight. The leopard cannot change its spots. Obama’s vaunted turn to diplomacy as a cornerstone of American foreign policy is belied by US actions in general, neither drone assassinations nor paramilitary operations for regime change being exemplars of diplomacy. (In Geneva, Ms. Ashton, rather than Kerry, appears to have been the successful negotiator, with the announcement of an agreement initially coming from the EU.)

It is instructive to see my initial response to the agreement before it had been finalized, then three days later, the fuller elaboration of its significance for the region and the larger picture. Implicitly, the world-situation did not suddenly brighten because of it. First then, my *New York Times* Comment (Nov. 23) to David Sanger and Judi Rudoren's article, "A Gamble in Iran Nuclear Talks: Easing Sanctions," which takes seriously the criticisms of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and members of Congress that Obama is appeasing Iran (to me absurd, because, like the case of Afghanistan, the US adopts an all-or-nothing position, warnings within the handshakes) follows:

Incredibly cold-blooded logic (?) on the critics' part. Sanctions are international blackmail, warfare under the guise of legality, and by rights should be condemned. What gives the US legitimacy to freeze assets, subject people to hardship, stunt economic growth? The Obama-Kerry position is highly punitive, yet the critics to their Right threaten still more—a race to the moral bottom!

Given Obama's track record on intervention, assassination, huge military outlays, I doubt whether negotiations will reach agreement, Kerry always ready with new conditions to sabotage an accord. America has already harmed its international standing with eavesdropping on world leaders, and Iran will be another step in causing friction, here in the G5+1. The US under Obama is desperate to maintain its position of global hegemony, using sanctions in one place, paramilitary operations in another, drone strikes in a third.

The natural corollary to getting away with sanctions, etc., abroad, is massive surveillance at home, an absolute disregard of civil liberties. Totalitarianism is no stranger to America currently, yes, under the banner of liberalism. I'm glad FDR isn't around to see the devolution of American democracy. Iraq, Afghanistan, is Iran next?

Next, my Comment to Roger Cohen's article (Nov. 26), "Israel's Iran Dilemma," which, without referring to Obama's additional pressure placed on China, serves to clarify the stabilizing-moderating aspects of the Iranian partial rapprochement on the Middle East itself:

Bravo Roger, a much-needed assessment. Iran beckons the future, Israel is mired in the past. W/o quite saying it, his portrayal of Israel implies a political will only satisfied with domination, Iran and the Palestinians intertwined in an Israeli mindset rigidly determined to be on top, i.e., militaristic, authoritarian—a DISGRACE to the liberal/progressive Judaism of my youth. Wrapping itself in the mantle of the Jewish State, it vitiates the teachings of Torah, taking on aspects of the totalitarian regimes which murdered the Six Million in the Holocaust.

Netanyahu preens, a little Napoleon, willing to court unmitigated disaster just to show how tough he is. He verily speaks for the nation, given the lack of fundamental protest in Israel. And now one fully expects AIPAC to swing into action, poisoning the wells of diplomacy in order to vindicate Israel's regional power-politics.

The surprise here is Obama and Kerry, neither one having established a previous record favoring diplomacy over war. My hunch is, the US position has more to it than meets the eye: a realistic framework of regional accommodation in the Middle East, in order then to turn full attention to the Far East. Yes, the pivot, the Pacific-first strategy—clear the decks in

order to confront China. A massive deployment of forces already, a China-bashing psychology so that America can retain—amid its declining political-economic structure—unilateral global superpower status. Obama is still Obama.

The fourth piece in this jigsaw puzzle mapping an emerging totalitarian landscape is surveillance, in the news now because the ACLU has announced a court challenge to USG policy on this practice (belatedly, I suggest, given the use of the Espionage Act to prosecute whistleblowers and DOJ's briefs suspending the habeas corpus rights of detainees, these for starters in the Obama-Holder disregard for civil liberties and encouragement of the intelligence community's means of evasion, as in Manning's solitary confinement, which may not be waterboarding but illustrates the urge to punish). Perhaps the ACLU has not dallied in taking action, although most liberal/progressive groups still give Obama a free pass, because it took the Snowden revelations to bring out the scope and depth of surveillance. Now, no excuse for action, and I fear the ACLU case is not sufficiently comprehensive to show the danger to America of domestic spying, itself *prima facie* totalitarian—beyond the wildest dreams of McCarthyism, and even now, documents released that NSA has strategies for gaining still greater powers. If Obama were accountable for nothing else, this alone should be enough to hound him from office. Yet surveillance goes hand-in-hand with the rest because revealing hostility to human dignity in its living, meaningful proportions.

Surveillance strips the individual of privacy, that which allows his/her autonomous growth, the erection of walls which keep at bay the systemic manipulation of character, the assault of consumerism, and the propaganda of an instilled patriotism, all of which engender false consciousness and the militarization of societal values. One could not have privatization of the public sphere—and get away with it, secretive decision-making and court decisions, and thus, the disconnection of government and the people—and get away with it, and an international posture of aggressive financial and market penetration, combined with intervention, regime change, assassination—and get away with it, if it were not for a people cowed into submission through the display of State power, the drum beat of intervention, the sense of defeat in proposing, let alone realizing, alternative pathways to political-social development.

Surveillance is a late-starter, to the structural fragmentation of the person, but more than icing on the cake it is crucial at this stage, the ratifying condition for sustaining systemic obedience—where every thought is potentially capable of being monitored. Government reduces to its most egregious functions. More power to the ACLU; it will need it, in working through a judicial system which has closed ranks around Executive fiat, Congressional accommodation to the primacy of business and the military, and its own vanguard-role in securing the foundations of capitalism against threats, mostly imaginary, to its existence. Its toleration of surveillance confirms its retrograde status and significance. My *New York Times* Comment (Nov. 23) to its editorial, "Surveillance Goes on Trial," follows:

First, if USG were democratic (massive surveillance argues it is not) it would award Snowden the Medal of Freedom. He is the conscience of the nation Obama wants to silence, expunge the revelations, and have business as usual, i.e., militarization of the American polity, power concentrated on maintaining global hegemony, domestic psychological repression (via the atmosphere and culture of spying) to hide daily commission of war crimes (e.g., drone-strike assassinations), all to what end?



ACLU is a late starter. Evidences of a totalitarian historical progression, under the cover of counterterrorism, abound, from McCarthyism, when anticommunism became ingrained in the American psyche, to today, when perceived threats to Exceptionalism seemingly justify widespread intervention, military budgets choking off the social safety net, license for universal eavesdropping of world leaders, in sum, rampant amoral cynical official behavior flagrantly in defiance of the Constitution.

Yet, better late than never, though one suspects ACLU's legal analysis will avoid the realities of power. Sweeps, metadata, secret judicial (?) rulings of the FISA Court, an obvious pattern of deceit and illegality, to be sure, but what of the vicious circle whereby Congress authorizes violative practices and both POTUS and NSA (the two inextricable) plead their legitimacy citing the legislation? Only a total cleaning of the Augean stables (which will never happen) will do, Obama on down.

As the fifth piece in the jigsaw puzzle mapping an emerging totalitarian landscape, most conspicuous, and ultimately related to privatization, we see the mechanical breakdown of the health-care plan, a headline-grabber largely for all of the wrong reasons—the haste involved in its presentation etc. etc., but not the *substantive* criticism of its provisions. I consider this separately from the others because in its own way the problems involved with the website illustrate how government abdicates all semblance of social-moral obligation to its citizenry, fobbing off a plan that, contrary to its Right-wing critics, insulates capitalism from the rational implementation of a health-insurance regimen conceived as the fundamental right to care of ALL in society. Obama is playing with us; conserving the privilege of insurers and pharmaceutical companies, subsisting at the public's expense, simultaneously eliminating the democratization of medicine in all its manifestations, primary research to preventative programs, indicates the general pattern of betrayal and abuse, in which government is turned against the people rather than made to serve them.

In that light, computer glitches, poor design, the selection of incompetent or irresponsible contractors, is incidental—and to be expected. Where profit rules supreme, accountability flies out the window. Let Obamacare go forward, followed by a dismantlement of the social safety net, so that American health care comes to approximate Third World conditions, and *then* perhaps—just barely perhaps—the people will begin to listen, think for themselves, demand, and act on the demand, of a health-care system not politicized nor poisoned by capitalistic assumptions of profit. If that happens with health care, it could have a falling-domino effect (what is most feared and the reason for such fierce resistance to change) on other institutions-for-profit, on, indeed, capitalism as such. My *New York Times* Comment (Nov. 23) to Eric Lipton, Ian Austen, and Sharon LaFraniere's article, "Tension and Flaws Before Health Care Website Crash," which is an excellent summary of dealings with private contractors during the run-up to the program's introduction, follows:

"...and here are all the options." No, Obama, not all the options. You strangled both single-payer and the public option day one, no guts to take either of them to the people. This breakdown is a blessing: a rotten system of health insurance, vast profits to the health insurance industry, and the entering wedge to PRIVATIZATION for Social Security and Medicare itself. Your intention all along. Your signature measure? Fine. I would have nominated drone assassinations for that honor, but this will do—not the manifest incompetence (and deceit in covering it up) but the blind favoring of the Vested Interests over the American public.

Health care is sacrificed (along with much else) on the altar of market fundamentalism, itself symptomatic of the wider deregulation of the US economy driving USG on your watch—open door to wealth concentration, bankers’ criminal practices, destruction of the social safety net, all as prerequisite for the forcible insistence on unilateral global leadership in a world structure no longer susceptible to US guidance (i.e., dominance). Future history texts will see this chapter as the Era of Counterrevolution, both at home, wiping out the New Deal, and abroad, using counterterrorism as an ideological tactic to forestall US capitalism’s decline as its manufacturing base erodes, its financial system creates assorted bubbles and malfunctions, and the people suffer increasing privations.

Five seemingly unrelated aspects of current administration policy may be thought of, instead, as forming a unitary construct held together, integrated, actualized in ongoing practice, with the promise in future of maintaining the same lines of continuity, of a National-Security State enveloping and enveloped by an advanced stage of capitalism, brittle, ideologically rigid, for that reason fighting more tenaciously for its place in the sun than ever as it faces a world of multiple power centers no longer accepting US unilateral dominance.

For the sake of capitalist hegemony, its own, not that of the EU, Latin America, and the Far East, the US willingly sacrifices its own people in the working class and a silently emerging *underclass* as well to the needs of the political economy of extreme and concentrated wealth. If that means the outsourcing of its manufacturing capability, so be it. If that means, deregulation of the banking system, as the engine of economic growth, so be it. If that means, a fascistic-inclined political order leading to a regimentation of consciousness, so be it. These are not idle changes, psychotic visions of the financial-military elites; they are working their way through the historical process, even as I write. Presently, attention is drawn to foreign policy, first, Iran, and at this very moment, China’s air defense zone (vide, my *CounterPunch* article, “Diplomacy via B52s,” Nov. 29-Dec. 1), but I suspect it is domestic society, less sensational, which is the locus of totalitarian trends, and which makes possible the international push for hegemony, hence not to be overlooked. Here, then, are my two further *New York Times* Comments (both Nov. 29), which amplify earlier themes: one, concerning Krugman’s article, “Obamacare’s Secret Success,” a numerical sleight-of-hand because he claims health-cost savings of the plan without considering what could have been achieved under alternatives Obama swept aside, the single-payer system and the public option; two, concerning the NYT editorial, “Government in Slow Motion,” a standard criticism of Republican standpattism (correct as far as it goes), but which, also as standard liberal, even progressive, procedure, gives Obama a free pass and ignores the profoundly bipartisan composition of basic policy:

I Health costs appear to be under control within the existing framework, allowing Prof. Krugman the Panglossian view of the best of all possible worlds. BUT, what if health costs could be judged by a different standard, the one POTUS destroyed before even trying for its achievement—the single-payer system, or even the public option?

Rather than focus on Republican obstruction, why not admit Obama’s own shortcomings, really the betrayal or abandonment of principle associated with the ’08 campaign. America’s health is being depressed, weakened, on the altar of a bipartisan societal disease—privatization. Obama, more sophisticated than most Republicans, is doing their work for them, in the form of a permeating deregulation creating differentiations across the board, from income and power to genuine health care.

To focus on gains within a privatized system of health insurance—the laughing stock of the advanced-industrial world—is, witting or not, to shill for the insurers and pharmaceutical giants. I expect from Prof. Krugman a more critical analysis, not because I raise an ideological standard of Left, Center, or Right, but because a precise, carefully researched dissection of Obamacare measured against the realistic appraisal of alternative systems that Obama has ruled out from day one, would reveal how little savings, and at what cost to patients’ health, has been effected.

II The Times persists in focusing on Republican obstruction, rather than bipartisan consensus on the most egregious govt. policies. If it worried less about the “Pentagon’s readiness,” and the fate of the “defense authorization bill,” and questioned instead both extravagant military budgets and Obama’s foreign policy, together yielding not simply militarism per se but a fundamental drain on the nation’s finances, it could then approach budget issues with greater clarity and, yes, moral authority.

The cancer gnawing at America’s budgetary problems is obviously that combination of military spending and the policy of global intervention. Why not ask, how much could be saved by abandoning drone assassination? paramilitary operations of CIA and JSOC geared to regime change and/or facilitating market penetration? giant subsidies to favored corporations? modernization of the nuclear stockpile? Etc.

Democrats and Republicans alike constitute a unified war party. Ignore that, as The Times has, and budget difficulties will remain for the foreseeable future.

DECEMBER 6, 2013

### **Obama’s Prostitution of Democracy**

I write as a critic of capitalism, something I instinctively felt, compounded by further study, for sixty years, or three-fourths of my life. For those opposed to a global posture of intervention, war, and the broad swath of counterrevolutionary activity, from death squads and assassination to the more deft methods of regime change, such opposition is fully warranted. I place myself among them, and even as a teenager in the late-1940s, it was clear to me that McCarthyism was inextricably linked with foreign-policy aggressiveness and provocation in the Cold War.

For those opposed to capitalism as a more surface phenomenon, the ugly, self-indulgent, showy consumerism, so beautifully caught by Thorstein Veblen decades earlier and, if anything, grown more strident and inane since, I, too, count myself a voice of disgust, at the shallowness and the disposition to exploit others in furtherance of comfort and display, among the critics. And for those who hold such a system responsible for ALIENATION because of its commodity structure which converts use value into exchange value and utterly dehumanizes the individual into a socially blind and indifferent person who negotiates life through all moral and emotional divestiture in relation to others, *that* profound loss of healthy nonthreatened and nonthreatening ego clinched for me—assisted by my Cambridge friend, and refugee from Naziism, Fritz Pappenheim, and his magnificent book *The Alienation of Modern Man*, based on Marx’s *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*—opposition to capitalism as the degradation of humanity.

Yet an editorial in the *New York Times* (Dec. 4) caught my eye, the plea for corporate transparency as a means of protecting shareholders' interests, especially concerning secretive campaign donations, and made me want to draw distinctions within capitalism itself—not to exonerate the system as a whole, but to indicate elements of relative social decency to be set against capitalism's voracious appetite for causing harm. One need not be blind to improvements that at least in theory could be made to capitalism (granted, an uphill battle when integral to systemic conservation is its self-protective mechanisms of overruling authentic reform and social welfare), Keynesianism as one obvious example, but also the literal application of ground rules to keep the market framework honest, against all tendencies to the contrary.

Thus, today's editorial: Mary Jo White, an Obama appointee, as chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, steadfastly refusing to regulate corporate behavior in light of transparency, shareholder interests, and, dare I say, the general good. Even if the SEC worked to perfection, capitalism would still be capitalism, but perhaps, just perhaps, regulation would control for capitalism's more atavistic traits, among them, showing instead some restraint in the corruption of the body politic, from control of the political process to using the firm for self-enrichment while also fostering further wealth concentration in itself and in calling on government for protection and foreign expansion. Chairwoman White is the perfect appointee for advancing the agenda of sophisticated corporatism, same old, same old, but now, under Obama, waving a liberal banner as presumed testimony the rough edges of criminality have been smoothed out—criminality, in being a party to imperialism, to establishing an antilabor front at home, to adjusting the corporate tax system so as to place the burden well down the line, etc. etc.

We have, then, illustration of the fraudulent character of business-banking regulation, in which the public interest is squashed, spit upon, whichever major party is at the helm. But Obama is a particular example of a bad apple in democracy's orchard. Clinton, another. All of the handwringing about the Republicans merely gives the Democrats a get-out-of-jail card while the "game" of Monopoly goes on. My *New York Times* Comment to the editorial, "Keeping Shareholders in the Dark," also Dec. 4, follows:

The appointment of Chairwoman White is one more confirmation of the Obama administration's commitment to Deregulation. Obama groupies who still believe in his credentials for pursuing the general welfare will not be fazed by this further indication of his blind trust in America's corporate and banking elite, and contempt for working people.

The Times's words here are golden: "Good corporate governance requires that companies are transparent about their use of corporate resources." How expect this when USG itself is furthest removed from being transparent? when FISA decisions are made in secret? when Obama's obsession with secrecy trumps—combined with his desire for mass surveillance—bedrock principles of democratic government?

The Times would like to see a capitalist system based on openness and fairness. Obama beginning with his marginalizing of Paul Volcker made it clear its brand of capitalism is founded on favoritism, wealth concentration, and, yes, militarism, which throws the mantle of national security around the process of wealth concentration and corrupt practices—as USG sits on its hands.

This interpenetration of business and government is not good for either, and premonishes the organization of the business system (corporatism) under European fascism. Honesty in business is a nonstarter in present-day Washington.

Granted, my indictment of capitalism above—imperialism, conspicuous consumption, alienation—is not adequate to the task of a full-scale systemic indictment, not only because other perhaps equally harmful features of capitalism are left out (e.g., the havoc on working people both of the proletarianization of class structure and the social misery created therein and as a whole by extreme business-cycle fluctuations), but also the way these indictable features are interrelated, feed upon and strengthen each other, so that we see a totality of privation and degradation, Capitalist Man/Woman inherently destructive and self-destructive unless fiercely resisted and, seeking to break free from the (even rock-bottom) epistemological constraints of commodity-structure, work largely unassisted for nonalienated forms of alternative societal formations in which *property* and *profit* no longer are determinative in defining political and moral consciousness.

A big mouthful, yet also a big order: When all is said and done, is capitalism (particularly in America, where, in comparison with Europe, it already takes on heightened form, and steadily extirpates mixed features, such as a single-payer health program and high, near-confiscatory corporate taxation combined with plowing back the resulting resources into education and the continual upgrading of the social safety net) incompatible with, simply put, human freedom? For now, in America, capitalism is human freedom, and to be projected onto the world stage as the litmus test of “friends and allies,” otherwise condemned to varying gradations of hostility, leading to intervention, boycotts, regime change, or merely intimidating displays of US military power. American capitalism has historically become inseparable from unilateral global dominance—in fact (from the aftermath of World War Two to perhaps the late 1990s) and, since, now no longer the actuality with the rise of China, EU consolidation, Brazil, Japan, emergent Third World industrialization, all making for a profoundly decentralized global power structure in which US hegemony is a matter of wish-fulfillment accompanied by steadily increasing military implementation.

Therefore when I say, “Capitalism at a Cross-Roads,” I mean more than cosmetic changes to conserve the System, because public policy, done with conviction, can make life appreciably better for the society and its people, what I believe it was Marcuse who said, in *Reason and Revolution*, though not conceding even cosmetic change, “absorption of the negativity,” itself a brilliant concept, but more as postponement than as life-sustaining permanence because precisely the will to democratization is lacking and inherently in opposition or contradiction to its workings. Here Obama is the Band-Aid Man, worse, using the band-aid to cover over the very trends and practices which have earned capitalism bragging rights for exploitation and the inner desiccation of the human psyche—both necessary for its continued operation.

As usual, the New York Times is easily fooled; it wants to be. It cannot break from Obama on its editorial page, for that would mean rethinking the nature of the American political system for starters, leading then to questioning the inner democratization of the American polity, and from there, the Pandora’s Box of capitalist involvement: Wall Street, megabanks, Fed policies directly giving blood transfusions to them and increasing their profitability, hedge funds, corporate behavior, failed, inert, unimpressive regulatory bodies doing the work of protecting and enriching their supposed targets of regulation, and this scratches the surface only, as capitalism and

government in utmost symbiosis, no longer dissimilar organisms but identical in purpose and pride of combined achievement in building and operating a class-state, today made easier because the class-state has been subsumed within the National-Security State, calling on all for patriotic devotion and observance. Not surprisingly, then, *The Times*, in its editorial the following day (Dec. 5), “The President on Inequality,” finds hope in Obama’s extended speech (Dec. 4), “Remarks by the President on Economic Mobility,” delivered before the Center for American Progress, which at every point offers promises and plans with his left hand, and which his actions hitherto and, from every evidence thus far, will continue through to the end of his term (and likely well beyond by the Democratic Party) cancel, dead on arrival, by his right hand. Figuratively, Obama, two right hands, the left unceremoniously cut off when the writing was on the wall: rhetorical flights to appease the electorate, no-show and worse for his prime constituency, which quickly came to include the military and intelligence communities as part of an integrated ruling stratum.

Ah, the rhetoric: “...we’re greater together than we are on our own.” Together, not as in class solidarity, but as in “Economic Mobility,” all striving to get ahead, the American Way; and not “on our own,” while surveillance strips the individual of privacy and dignity, and actual economic policies have the effect of socially fragmenting working people, both as a class through the hostile climate for labor organization, and as individuals, many unemployed, underemployed, facing foreclosure, and facing uncertainty, as such straightforward remedies as federal and state job creation (he has the nerve of claiming the heritage of FDR and the New Deal) go by the board. Paying lip service to the hard-pressed needs of fellow citizens, Obama continues: “I believe this is the defining challenge of our time: Making sure our economy works for every working American. It’s why I ran for President. It was at the center of last year’s campaign. It drives everything I do in this office.” (Italics, mine) If delusional states were grounds for impeachment (or an extended stay at Walter Reed), he would be out of there forthwith. The selfless champion of the working man/woman. Move over Horatio Alger (and Axelrod first term, Rhodes today, teleprompters then and now, as tests of his sincerity): “Now, the premise that we’re all created equal is the opening line of the American story. And while we don’t promise equal outcomes, we have strived to deliver equal opportunity—the idea that success doesn’t depend on being born into wealth or privilege, it depends on effort and merit. And with every chapter we’ve added to that story, we’ve worked hard to put those words into practice.”

Genug, as we say in Yiddish. Enough is enough. The speech rambles on for at least another forty minutes, platitude on platitude, as meanwhile wealth concentration progresses by the minute, revolving doors turn faster and faster, armed drones kill more civilians, the School of the Americas trains more death squads, aircraft carrier battle groups descend on the Pacific, and VP Biden, plastered smile and all, reaffirms Abe’s militarism, both as ideology and fact, in Japan. China becomes the staging area for America’s new Cold War, partly to keep capitalism humming at home, partly to justify counterterrorism (applicable to any and all who disagree with us) as the surrogate for counterrevolution, partly—and the list might be continued indefinitely—to ensure the cries of working people will be stifled or sidetracked in the bread-and-circuses of patriotism and the domestic atmosphere of indirect social control through highly direct surveillance. My New York Times Comment (Dec. 5) to the editorial of the same date follows:

NYT, please stop shielding a POTUS who has accelerated the very economic inequality and closed the door to improving upward mobility—both of which you shower unjustified praise

on him— that, notwithstanding '08 campaign promises, he has failed miserably in achieving, or even attempting. Obama has done everything **WRONG** from the standpoint of societal democratization. He worships at the shrine of deregulation and market fundamentalism. His key economic advisers are drawn largely from Wall Street and the financial community. His executive agencies have made a mockery of regulation—SEC, FDA, Interior—, a record Ayn Rand would be proud of. And his obsession with Big Military has drained the public coffers, to the detriment of a meaningful social safety net.

Yet NYT takes his speeches seriously, esp. when he says, “I am convinced that the decisions we make on these issues....” Decisions to convert America into a National Security State through massive domestic and international surveillance, destroying the right of privacy and rule of law in one swipe.

Continue the adulation, as America slides further into widespread deprivation, on both economic and moral fronts (the latter, when a US president personally authorizes targeted assassination). You cannot have it both ways: presumed interest in fostering equality while bending every effort to intensify the financialization and militarization of American capitalism—w/o manufacturing, fewer jobs. Nuts.

At the cross-roads, the sign directing traffic appears to be to the Right, the Left, under the misleading sign “Under Construction,” is in process of being permanently closed off, obstructions everywhere, barriers at every quarter-mile, a monstrous sign, “**PRIVATIZATION**,” instructing the foolhardy to turn back and take the right fork.

DECEMBER 9, 2013

### **Distortions of Capitalism**

As American manufacturing, relatively speaking, in world-structural terms, continues to decline, we are witnessing for that very reason an increasing reliance on the military implementation of US global hegemony—an ultimately losing stratagem in the face of the global rise of multiple power centers, notably, China, but also a more coherent EU, the standbys Russia and Japan, newcomers, e.g., Brazil, and gradually emerging Third World modernization. We are no longer top dog, unilaterally defining capital flows, trading patterns, etc., to our liking. As US economic prowess recedes, its militarism is brought to the fore in ambitious schemes pairing offensive power-operations with imposed trade partnerships, as in Obama’s Pacific-first strategic framework side-by-side with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

In both cases, the target is China, the first, as an object of encirclement and containment, the second, by virtue of its *exclusion*, similar fencing in and hoped-for economic ostracism. Obama and his national-security mavens, long habituated to Cold War thinking, are spoiling for war (or, short of war, the use and popularization of counterterrorism, to reinforce America’s post-World War II posture—to the present—of counterrevolution).

In Smithian terms, capitalism was thought the harbinger of international peace, trade a universal solvent of friendly, if competitive, relations. Not so, then or now, and by the twentieth century, the cauldron of rivalries culminating in war. We have not entered a New World of global development,

rather, the opposite, the regurgitation of war-provoking tensions principally stimulated by an international division of labor, America in the foreground of riding herd on less-developed nations. Not even autarky, bad as it is, is an option, for the US, in sacrificing its budget and resources to the militarization of capitalism, is falling behind in maintaining a vital industrial base, accompanied by crumbling infrastructure, declining educational standards, and, trying to play catch-up with itself, an increase in the frequency of bubbles, unemployment, and widening class differences.

With difficulties of this magnitude, self-inflicted in the first place, no wonder an American leadership beholden to the upper stratum of wealth, and bereft of imagination, moving inexorably toward more aggressive political-economic strategies to forestall further decline. Hence, intervention, regime change, drone assassination, massive surveillance at home, eavesdropping on world leaders, and the attempted tightening of spheres of interest and influence, from the Middle East to Central and East Asia. Preparation for international conflict is presently a leading growth industry, facilitated by a benumbed populace jaded by technological gadgetry and imagined or blown up major-party differences, as the engine of wealth-accumulation goes on, now under the banner (making everything more deceptive) of liberalism.

In America, capitalism is the only show in town, a situation unlikely to change for decades, if ever. One cannot help but wonder, however, what a shortened version of the end-of-times scenario would be, an awakening to democratic values, compelling the structural lessening of class differences, or, in contrast, a still more hierarchical social system, permanent underclass and all, driven by a rancid individualism to disguise naked privilege—the *threshold of fascism* perhaps already upon us.

I write, not as an alarmist, but one who seeks to measure the freedom of a society by such common indices as respect for the right of privacy, the commitment of national sources of wealth to the health and well-being of its people, not the opportunities (i.e., market penetration, ideological dominance) of conquest, and the creation of a social or public ethic which transcends and severely modifies the societal framework of corporatism at the heart of business development. At this point, the record is zero, contempt for privacy, diversion of wealth to death-sustaining forces, and privatization trumping the very concept of a social or public ethic (and the moral obligations to be observed through democratic governance).

My *New York Times* Comment on Ben Protess and Jessica Silver-Greenberg's article, "Bank Tracked Business Linked to China Hiring," (Dec. 8), which traces the JPMorgan Chase "Sons and Daughters" program in China, exposing through documents the bribery of public officials in state enterprises through the hiring of their children for bank positions, follows (same date):

Declined to comment. Declined to provide further details. Here we go again, the Obama administration and JPMorgan Chase dancing a minuet around the facts. Bribery, not surprising—hiring practices analogous to the revolving-door practice, whether China or the US. What astonishes me is that SEC even investigates at all, although it is unlikely we will see criminal prosecutions over bribery. (Already NY executives of the firm are claiming no knowledge of the content of "Sons and Daughters," thus providing themselves—probably with government connivance—deniability.)

American banking has reached a new low, not only because of buying influence in China, but also buying influence in the US, as in the abrogation of Glass-Steagall under Clinton, itself part of the wider trend of deregulation and, at bottom, the FINANCIALIZATION of American capitalism. The structural/systemic



outcome is not confined to banking, for with this emphasis we also see the decline of American manufacturing, thus making for a growing distortion in the nation's economic make-up and future.

The SEC is a microcosm of the administration: friendly to nonexistent regulation, as government becomes increasingly severed from pursuit of the general welfare. No, Morgan has not been caught with its pants down. These revelations will become transmogrified into praise, as the hustle and ingenuity of American business abroad.

DECEMBER 13, 2013

### **Obama, Prince of War**

POTUS, self-appointed voice of global democracy, is a sham; worse, delusional if he swallows his rhetoric, cruelly opportunistic if, as I believe, he doesn't. The analogy that comes to mind here, fortunately a hypothetical, would be J. Edgar Hoover, at a service for Dr. King. Blood on his hands, Obama the inversion of Mandela at every turn, yet ringing the changes of freedom, democracy, peace, while the Behemoth of global interventionism, like a massive steamroller, plows forward, the Middle East and China flashpoints in a comprehensive hegemonic framework. The world's ranking militarist, in point of "assets," expenditures, arsenals, geostrategic planning, preens before the world audience, speaking power to truth, rather than the reverse, even stooping to the deception of a handshake with Raul Castro knowing full well the contrived symbolism of standing in Mandela's shadow has no bearing whatever on the half-century embargo of Cuba, the sanctions representing a vain attempt at destroying an alternative form of social life which has brought only unnecessary suffering to a proud people.

Showmanship is cheap; if I were Raul I would have spit in his eye, and told him to move on. No, courtesy and protocol have no place where oppressors are involved.

I will quote only sparingly from Obama's address—what's the use, when honeyed words fly on serpent's wings? The striking point is how much he is in denial, his words applied to Mandela (meant really to justify his own actions) become razor-like indictments of his record. There is his use of the word "ubuntu," identified with Mandela, eliciting applause, which signifies that "we are all bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us." That by itself, the vulgarization of ubuntu—through the use of demonization of all who contest American rulership, worse still, whose sharing and caring by US forces translates as drone missiles on funerals and other "collateral damage"—sets the stage for self-congratulation as a caring leader solicitous of the welfare of all Americans.

The speech is as much about himself (not surprising, given his absolute control of his image, witness a *Times* op-ed, Dec. 12, by an AP photojournalist describing White House image-management) as a tribute to Mandela. Commenting on the latter's passing as "a time of mourning, and a time to celebrate a heroic life," Obama adds: "But I believe it should also prompt in each of us a time for self-reflection. With honesty, regardless of our station, or our circumstances, we must ask: How well have I applied his lessons in my own life? It's a question I ask myself, as a man and as a President." We know the answer.

Egotist extraordinaire, except when the exercise of self-flagellation suits his purpose, the false modesty passing for “cool,” Obama almost unwittingly portrays a world of ongoing struggles for societal betterment which, in fact, reveals the very problems plaguing America on his watch: “The struggles that follow the victory of formal equality or universal franchise may not be as filled with drama and moral clarity as those that came before, but they are no less important. For around the world today, we still see children suffering from hunger and disease [and drone strikes (mine)]. We still see run-down schools. We still see young people without prospects for the future. Around the world today, men and women are still imprisoned for their political beliefs [Obama’s use of the Espionage Act directed against whistleblowers, more than all previous presidents combined (mine)]....” One wonders, does he ask himself, “as a man and as a President,” about these conditions? In passing, education expenditures are a small fraction of that for defense. As for unemployment, estimates for young people range from 20%-40%, and that fails to account for those who have dropped out of the labor force through discouragement.

It only gets better, i.e., vainglorious: “And so we, too, must act on behalf of justice. We, too, must act on behalf of peace. There are too many people who happily embrace Madiba’s [Mandela’s patrilineal name] legacy of racial reconciliation, but passionately resist even modest reforms that would challenge chronic poverty and growing inequality. There are too many leaders who claim solidarity with Madiba’s struggle for freedom, but do not tolerate dissent from their own people.” Tell that to Snowden and Manning, and tell all of us about the widest class differentiation in American history—i.e., class differences in income, wealth, and power—and the burdens especially falling on the black community. Then the flicker of self-flagellation, or false modesty, which makes everything alright: “And there are too many of us on the sidelines, comfortable in complacency or cynicism, when our voices must be heard.” A final quotation suffices: “The questions we face today—how to promote equality and justice; how to uphold freedom and human rights; how to end conflict and sectarian war—these things do not have easy answers....We can choose a world defined not by conflict, but by peace and justice and opportunity.”

As the battleships plow the seas, the long-range bombers remain finely tuned, the joint maneuvers with “friends and allies” continue on schedule, the status-of-forces agreements protect our “noble warriors” from punishment for crimes in the lands we have invaded, etc. etc.

Rather, let’s turn to the record, the solid wall on which the words are tacked up. Foremost, militarism, embodied in a global network of bases, a vast outpouring of appropriations, constant modernization of weaponry to ensure greater lethality, arms-financing to “friends and allies” which in turn furthers US geostrategic aims at the same time putting down dissidents in recipients’ countries, and for good measure, espionage on a heretofore undreamt of scale, eavesdropping practically universalized, plus the selective use of cyber warfare—and not a military aficionado, I’m sure I left out plenty. Also, where does one put counterterrorism beyond its most salacious (here, not sexual but depraved, sadistic) form, purposeful assassination as itself a weapon of terror, as manifested in widespread civilian casualties, including children’s deaths? Militarism, in fact, infuses the whole structure of policy and thought, coinciding with the hierarchical shaping of the business system and capitalist values—gradations of worth, some people more equal than others, and “enemies” the legitimate target of disdain and worse.

Then there is America itself, the record of permissive capitalism run amuck, poisoning the wells of human identity (this condition of course predates Obama, but his absolute disconnect from mass

deprivation, while waving aloft a liberal banner, muddies political consciousness, giving way to Voltarean belief in the best of all possible worlds) through extolling business leadership, consumerism, the glories of war, as representing democracy. Here he gives us Fortress America, better yet, the National Security State, where foreign eavesdropping has its counterpart in, again, broadest ever, massive surveillance.

A Police State in-the-making, still wrapped in a liberal flag. Here too, we see (if I may use the term “logical” or even “brilliant”) consistency: the savaging of the social safety net as the prerequisite to a compliant as well as complicit populace willing to accept corporatism at home and the aggressive pursuit of hegemony abroad. At this moment of writing, there are vast demonstrations in Bangkok and Kiev, each numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Where, what about, New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, where equally if not greater grounds for dissatisfaction exist—instead, abject silence?

Yet we see pretend democratic leadership, Obama in the shadow of Mandela. A case might be made that “liberal” leadership is ultimately more dangerous than undisguised repression, for in *that* case the people have at least the chance of shaking off their stupor, perceiving reality for what it is, unvarnished lies to cushion reactionary social-economic policies, and begin to fight back. For now, self-imprisonment in the myths of patriotic dedication—to flag, country, JPMorgan Chase, Boeing, carrier battle groups, the whole configuration of American might and influence, in which government and business are fused inseparably—becomes indispensable background allowing Obama to prance about the world stage as a progressive figure, to which we remain blind as the rest of the world slowly catches on. My *New York Times* Comment on Nicholas Kristof’s excellent article, “How to Truly Honor Mandela,” which criticizes Obama for not “speaking up adequately on behalf of political prisoners,” Dec. 12, follows (same date):

“Mr. President, you can’t blame John Boehner for that.” Exactly right. The “that” is not only the force feeding of Samir Naji al-Hasan Moqbel. It is also an authoritarian, nontransparent regime—yes, regime, rather than government in the true democratic sense—which uses the excuse of Republican intransigence (accepted as a rationale by most Democrats, including liberals and progressives) to hide an infamous record of intervention, targeted assassination, JSOC-CIA paramilitary operations, and, in still larger terms, the containment of China leading to ultimate confrontation through the Obama Pacific-first strategy supplemented by the Trans-Pacific partnership. And that “that” doesn’t begin to tap the domestic abuses centered on a dismal record of deregulation, with SEC, FDA, just about all agencies and departments (e.g., Interior) bending to the ground in worship of banking, business, and myriad vested interests.

Viewing Obama at the memorial service for Nelson Mandela makes one want to puke, so fraudulent were his words. The Prince of War, not Peace, on Terror Tuesdays perusing the “hit list” personally authorizing whom to kill next, presiding over a foreign-policy apparatus steeped in visions of global hegemony, and, domestically, offering little to counteract unemployment, foreclosure, malnutrition. By rights, there should be demonstrations throughout America protesting the cynicism and manipulation of the whole governing edifice—instead, aimless discontent.

DECEMBER 17, 2013

## Obama's National Security State

The militarization of intelligence is not a new development. *That* had always been its primary if not also integral function from the start. E.g., the CIA did not and does not, to my knowledge, focus its resources on, or preoccupy itself with, compiling baseball stats or tables of comparative annual rainfall, but rather, has proven its adeptness at assassination, the broader range of regime-change activities, and now, with JSOC forces and private contractors, it fulfills, under Obama's aegis, an enlarged operational role beyond strict intelligence of planning and executing drone killings (even possessing its own fleet of drones).

To this obviously military dimension, especially of foreign policy, along with that of the intelligence sections of the individual military-service branches, in what amounts to a holding pattern of business as usual, one finds something new and, I believe, more sinister, added under his watch. Obama has raised the military-factor in the intelligence realm a significant notch over even that of his predecessors by means of combining its military and civilian aspects under a unified command structure.

This auspicious move, as reported by David Sanger and Thom Shanker in their *New York Times* article, "Obama to Keep Security Agency and Cyberwarfare Under a Single Commander," Dec. 13, represents a militarization not only of intelligence, but also of government itself. It is the concentration of such power via fusing, under one "military official," the National Security Agency and the Pentagon's cyberwarfare division, which (a) brings the intelligence community under military leadership, and directs its operational role into more aggressively oriented functions, and (b) with this military emphasis, serves both to enlarge Executive Power and inscribe a geopolitical strategy at its heart, as in Obama's war-prone Pacific-first strategy vis-à-vis China.

With Obama, so much becomes interconnected, and, from the standpoint of government transparency, as befitting a democratic society, utterly *impenetrable*, so that the militarization of government itself has as its leading edge the massive surveillance of the American people falling increasingly within the military orbit—a double whammy leading through the backdoor to a stronger, less responsible, more remote presidency.

Welcome, then, to Fortress America, Obama's Kafkaesque Castle, in which the impenetrability of government is intimately associated with secretiveness (I surmise, domestically, to cover over extreme partiality to corporate and banking interests through a studied policy and program of deregulation, and more broadly, cover *up* war crimes, as in drone warfare and attendant "collateral damage," abrogation of habeas corpus rights for detainees, and the nuts-and-bolts of counterterrorism, such as "enhanced interrogation," as well as on a global front the whole body of Snowden's revelations) and the short-circuiting of popular governance, the better to conduct military and trade operations close to the chest, as now, in the negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Eavesdropping on world leaders, if not a global citizenry as well, grandiose and insidious into the bargain, testifies further to the expansion, of course, of both the intelligence function and Executive Power, and arguably, these, and the foregoing (if I may use the term) *abuses* would hardly be possible without the driving spirit of global hegemony and the will fortified and made

practicable in the first place by the centrality of the military orientation to national and international policy and the actual battle strength and readiness underneath it.

Now, down to brass tacks. From the Sanger-Shanker article we learn that Obama is firmly in charge of the decision to unify what have become in practice complementary functions, to wit, intelligence and cyberwarfare, a decision knowingly concentrating power in a single official *and* somewhat through sleight-of-hand ensuring that he wears a military hat. Upon the retirement next year of Gen. Keith Alexander, who already holds both commands, Obama “must appoint a four-star military officer,” because “[o]nly a military commander can run Cyber Command, which is responsible for defending the military’s computer and sensor systems and carrying out *offensive computer-network attacks*.” (Italics, mine)

Such cyber attacks are becoming increasingly important (perhaps an Obama signature which may succeed that of drone assassination), but also noteworthy is the tail wagging the dog, cyberware the portal through which the military takes control of the National Security Agency. (Yes, Alexander now, but succeeding him with another general, as Obama plans, confirms the pattern, parallel to the way expanding the “hit lists” under John Brennan was intended by Obama to create the precedent for drone attacks binding future administrations—Obama, and those around him, conscious of making precedent-setting measures, as, e.g., Espionage Act prosecutions, often of a questionable nature.) Thus, they write: “But that also means the N.S.A. will be run by someone who has spent a career in the military culture, with the mind-set that engenders.”

No argument from Obama on that, although “[s]everal members of an advisory committee that submitted the report to Mr. Obama...expressed the view that the two organizations should be split, in part to assure civilian control of the N.S.A.” Because the report—more secretiveness—will not be made public “until next month,” this required real legwork from the reporters. There is much at stake here; in a Times article on Dec. 14, Mark Mazzetti and Michael Schmidt’s, entitled “Officials Say U.S. May Never Know Extent to Snowden’s Leaks,” to which I will recur, one sees Obama’s reasoning on the present case, the need to throw a safe blanket over N.S.A. to prevent further leaks. As Sanger and Shanker continue: “The agency is responsible for electronic intelligence gathering and has been at the center of the revelations about government surveillance.”

When I say, the militarization of intelligence, this signifies not only its broadly-conceived aims, but its literal envelopment within a command structure presumed less easy to penetrate. In proper-Washington doublespeak, Caitlin Hayden, National Security Council spokesperson, stated that Obama decided that “keeping the positions of N.S.A. director and Cyber Command commander together as one, dual-hatted position is the most effective approach to accomplishing both agencies’ missions.”

To hear her, one would think domestic massive surveillance and global eavesdropping were nonexistent or mere sideshows of NSA, and that its chief function was to assist the Cyber Command: “N.S.A. plays a unique role in supporting Cyber Command’s mission, providing critical support for target access and development, including linguistics, analysts, cryptanalytic capabilities and sophisticated technological infrastructure.” True, and not irrelevant for its own spying, or related espionage activities through joint efforts with the Cyber Command, as in what the reporters call attention to, “the ‘Olympic Games,’ the cyberattacks launched against Iran’s nuclear program.”

(But they make no mention of the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, possibly in collaboration with Mossad.)

The table of organization, however, becomes part of the (to me) frightening interconnections I mentioned, for as the reporters relate: “From its creation in 2009, Cyber Command has had a complicated organizational relationship within the military and intelligence community. It is not a stand-alone military command, but is subordinate to the Strategic Command in Nebraska, which has authority over America’s nuclear arsenal. But it is physically located at Fort Meade, in Maryland, alongside the National Security Agency.” Next-door neighbors, but now together with SAC and the “nuclear arsenal”—under military leadership, which POTUS prefers that way.

So does SD Hagel (no one wants to discuss or identify the nuclear arsenal in this context), and, still not issuing an “official statement on the decision to retain the current structure,” he—the reporters write—is relying on the judgment of “senior Pentagon officials” that NSA-Cyber Command unity “was based on an assessment that the military’s global combatant commanders rely heavily on both the security agency and Cyber Command for *real-time support*.” (Italics, mine) Last month, Hagel previewed the decision about not separating NSA and Cyber Command leadership, “in particular in measuring any changes against the risks to carrying out military operations around the globe.”

Is there any doubt that the militarization of intelligence (NSA), conjoined as it is to the military proper, is a fact of life? Hagel: “I listen to our combatant commanders very carefully on this, because they’re probably as big a user on a day-to-day basis of the benefits of having these two commands together as anyone. And we charge them—America charges them, the Congress, the president, I do—in each of their combatant commander responsibilities, to keep their areas safe, but also keep us all safe.” The same can be said for the other functions of NSA and Cyber Command, as well as, in light of the “military culture,” drone assassination, torture, sanctions and embargoes, poised confrontations, etc., etc. Gen. Dempsey, chair of the Joint Chiefs, echoed the sentiment for combination: “My interest is in assuring that the intelligence that the National Security Agency gathers is responsive to the needs of those out in the *tactical level fighting our wars*.” (Italics, mine) The friendly folks monitoring all US communications, implicitly making each of us potential terrorist suspects, are on the frontline “keep[ing] us all safe”—even presumably from ourselves.

For supplementary insight on the joint structure of NSA and Cyber Command, Mazzetti and Schmidt in The Times provide indispensable background on current Washington paranoia, thanks to Mr. Snowden. In effect, the National Security State must be made secure, and although they do not say it, intelligence firmly under military command supposedly will ensure its protection. At this point, no one seems able to determine how much he “extracted from classified government computers before leaving the United States, according to senior government officials.”

They further explain: “Investigators remain in the dark about the extent of the data breach partly because the N.S.A. facility in Hawaii where Mr. Snowden worked—unlike other N.S.A. facilities—was not equipped with up-to-date software that allows the spy agency [at least they call it *that*] to monitor which corners of its vast computer landscape its employees are navigating at any given time.” A more efficient command structure, one guesses, would prevent this and Snowden’s “cover[ing] his tracks by logging into classified systems using the passwords of other security

agency employees, as well as by hacking firewalls installed to limit access to certain parts of the system.”

USG is desperate, if not also embarrassed: “That Mr. Snowden was so expertly able to exploit blind spots in the systems of America’s most secretive spy agency illustrates how far computer security still lagged years after President Obama ordered standards tightened after the WikiLeaks revelations of 2010.” Never again, one can almost hear him say. Too, Snowden’s disclosures, speaking of embarrassment (an almost mortal blow to this thin-skinned POTUS, who guards his image like no other), set off a national debate about the expansion of the N.S.A.’s powers to spy both at home and abroad, and have left the Obama administration trying frantically to mend relations with allies after [Snowden’s] revelations about American eavesdropping on foreign leaders.” (From general experience, one can suggest that putting intelligence under the military places criticism off-limits, as when we speak of our “warriors” when discussing service members.)

In any case, the disclosures *must* stop, some officials even willing to grant Snowden amnesty, in exchange for remaining documents.

Rick Ledgett, who heads the NSA’s task force on the leaks, stated that amnesty is “worth having a conversation about. I would need assurances that the remainder of the data could be secured, and my bar for those assurances would be very high.” Under DOJ indictment for espionage and stealing government property, I suspect even full disclosure and self-abasement, particularly with the decision resting on a vindictive Obama, would not result in amnesty for Snowden, nor would he avail himself of the opportunity should it ever come. Principled action is not taken lightly, given his personal sacrifice (and the utter lack of comprehension on the part of Authority), nor would he permit the burying of subsequent disclosures.

The reporters write that the investigation continues, DOJ, with the FBI’s Washington field office in the lead, the NSA task force, a presidential advisory commission which just submitted its report—the wheels grind on in the effort to halt the disclosure of classified documents, already begun in 2010, with Chelsea Manning’s release of military chat logs and diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks. By “executive order” Obama established, in 2011, “a task force [led by the attorney general and the director of national intelligence] charged with ‘deterring, detecting, and mitigating insider threats, including the safeguarding of classified information from exploitation, compromise, or other unauthorized disclosure.’”

Why the frantic efforts at damage control? Why NSA’s huge organization, “approximately 35,000 employees,” larger than “any intelligence agency”? And probably greater still, taking into account both necessary auxiliary positions and the need for secrecy and to allay suspicions about the scope of spying activities. But for our purposes, WHY the combined civilian-military structure under the latter’s command, its ramifications for the wholesale destruction of civil liberties and the quelling of dissent, simultaneous with offering the rationale for a counterterrorism policy tightly pinned to securing global hegemony and—apparently its helpmate—the expansion of Executive Power? The answer to all three speaks for itself—the eclipse of democracy.

DECEMBER 20, 2013

## **Obstructions in Halting NSA Surveillance**

*[CP readers should read, in the Dec. 18 issue, two fine articles on topic: Rob Hager, “A Victory for the Constitution,” and Binoy Kampmark, “Outlawing the Metadata Program.” Undoubtedly there will be more. My analysis is slightly different from both, not the decision itself, which they address, and which has received widespread attention in the press, but rather the preliminaries, obstructions thrown up to the adjudication of USG surveillance that Judge Leon in roughly the first-half of his 68 page opinion had to take into account, essentially a clearing-away process, before establishing clear ground for rendering his decision. Why is this important? First, for showing the institutional and governmental structure of repression, semi-hiding under the mantle of the law, to protect illegal and unconstitutional practices when these come forward in defense of militarism, intervention, and the social control of the populace—here specifically the last-named. Second, demonstrating these obstructions, as he does, shows what Judge Leon was up against (his point for doing so), which accounts for the narrow scope and limited application of his decision—a sweeping pronouncement, yet having, leaving aside questions of reversal by a higher court, pertinence only to the plaintiffs, the violation of their Fourth Amendment rights, and not extended to the nation as a whole. Thus, on to dissecting the wording of the opinion.]*

### **I Eviscerating the Privacy Right**

By way of introduction, Adam Liptack in the New York Times, Dec. 18, the article entitled, “After Ruling Critical of N.S.A., Uncertain Terrain for Appeal,” quotes Judge Leon, himself troubled by the prior boxing-in of a clear channel for rendering his opinion: “I’m not sure how I’m going to come out, but I know it’s going upstairs.” That he stayed his order to allow for the appeal process, itself, I believe, an unnecessary compromise, one of several, psychologically inviting reversal, indicates that, although one should honor the man and credit the significance of his determining that the massive surveillance of Americans’ phone calls is probably unconstitutional, he in fact did not lay down the gauntlet, did not, therefore, expose the political-legal gangsterism currently in vogue at the highest levels—POTUS, DOJ, Congress, the Supremes down to the District Courts and, of course, FISC. Judge Leon did not blink from ridiculing the defense of the government, that the plaintiffs had no standing (this “defies common sense,” given the widespread public knowledge, and USG’s admission, of massive surveillance) and that surveillance had in fact foiled terrorist plots (How? When? Where?, no evidence forthcoming), yet that criticism did not—and because of prior obstacles put in place, e.g., provisions of the Patriot Act, and much more, Congress itself always a step ahead in fostering repression, taking no chances, perhaps *could not*—catapult him to the higher ground of a definitive rendering, spread broadcast, decisively constitutionally-rooted, and having effect without delay.

The initial stumbling block, the heart of Liptack’s analysis, is the difference between *concurring* and *controlling* opinions, here a 2012 opinion by the Supreme Court, in which the latter represents the precedent Judge Leon’s decision “blew past,” and the former, no more than an anticipation of where, in support, “the justices might be heading.” Not a happy prospect, because, going back to *Smith v. Maryland*, in 1979, the Court held—Liptack writes—that “a robbery suspect could not expect that his right of privacy extended to the numbers dialed from his phone. The government says the Fourth Amendment analysis in the new cases should begin and end with that decision.” Cut-and-dried, no Fourth Amendment defense on the right of privacy—thank you, POTUS and AG



Holder—when you voluntarily (by dialing!) give information to a third party, the telephone company. Ah, then in the 2012 decision, *United States v. Jones*, which “unanimously rejected the use of a GPS device to track the movements of a drug suspect over a month, we see what looks like support for the Leon decision, except that the majority held that “attaching the device violated the defendant’s property rights”—but no mention was made of his privacy rights.

Here we see a pair of concurrences, in which “five justices said the tracking raised concerns about the defendant’s *expectation* of privacy.” (Italics, mine—because it appears that in legal and constitutional interpretation, expectation plays an important role.) Bless her, Justice Sotomayor wrote, citing the Smith case: “to reconsider the premise that an individual has no reasonable expectation of privacy in information voluntarily disclosed to third parties.” Justice Kennedy, who announced for the Court in 1989 a principle affecting the concurring-controlling distinction, and hence, the order of priorities, now is invoked as though the Court metaphorically mounting its judicial horse to slay the privacy dragon, proclaims, in his words: “If a precedent of this court has direct application in a case, yet appears to rest on reasons rejected in some other lines of decisions, [lower court judges] should follow the case which *directly controls*, leaving to this court the prerogative of overruling its own decisions.” (Italics, mine) Does it work? Liptack cites a case last month in California, in which a federal judge, Jeffrey T. Miller, would not “grant a new trial to a defendant convicted of terrorism charges based on asserted Fourth Amendment violations arising from the N.S.A. program.” Exactly what is at issue. Judge Miller stated that he would not “blaze a new path and adopt the approach to *the concept of privacy* set forth by Justice Sotomayer in her concurrence in *United States v. Jones*.” (Italics, mine) No wonder Judge Leon, clearly aware of the California case, could say, “I’m not sure how I’m going to come out, but I know it’s going upstairs.”

Perhaps I’ve been too hard on him. As Liptack points out, Judge Leon strongly criticized the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), a secret court, in which the 15 judges who supervise the program of surveillance “have issued 35 orders authorizing it,” despite the fact that that the government “repeatedly made misrepresentations and inaccurate statements about the program,” deeply angering the judge. Liptack, in conclusion, quotes NYU law professor Barry Friedman, a specialist on the Fourth Amendment, to the effect that “only Judge Leon’s work was worthy of a federal judge.” In Friedman’s words, “Judge Leon’s reads as though there is a living, breathing, thinking person behind it. Right or wrong ultimately, it is full of detail, real-world fact and serious consideration. The FISA court opinions are lifeless. They read like a machine wrote them.” Lifeless? That’s too kind; politicized, kept jurists, the fact of deliberating in secret and, as we shall see, legitimating *ex parte* proceedings in which there is no party challenging the government, as well as keeping their *decisions* secret, should merit for them only scorn, ridicule, contempt, and the same for those who have empowered them under such conditions, the Chief Justice who makes the appointments, and the usual characters (suspects?), POTUS on down, who, burnishing the credentials of the Inquisition, add Joseph R. McCarthy for father-confessor and inspiring spirit, have reduced civil liberties in America to a sick joke.

## **II Klayman et al, v. Obama, et al., United States District Court For The District of Columbia, Dec. 16, 2013 [Dkt. # 13 (No. 13-0851), # 10 (No. 13-0881)]**

This Memorandum Opinion, befitting its importance, is heavily annotated, footnoted, a citational cornucopia which raises the danger of losing sight of the argument (my apologies, in advance, to CP

readers and contributors who may possess legal training, were I not to put a fine point on procedural matters), my emphasis now, shared, I believe, by Judge Leon, being the impedimenta preventing clear-sighted logical and constitutional reasoning. To begin: “On June 6 [i.e., six months ago, which speaks to the carefulness in Judge Leon’s bringing forward the proceedings], 2013, plaintiffs brought the first of two related lawsuits challenging the constitutionality and statutory authorization of certain intelligence-gathering practices by the United States government relating to the wholesale collection of the phone record metadata of all U.S. citizens.” I like the formulation: acknowledgment of the program and its dimensions, and challenges both on constitutional and statutory grounds.

It continues: “These related cases are two of several lawsuits [e.g., the ACLU v. Clapper, filed five days later, Southern District of New York, which, of course, also bears watching] arising from public revelations over the past six months [public revelations therefore giving the plaintiffs standing; also, recognition of Snowden’s revelations, six months before] that the federal government through the National Security Agency (‘NSA’), and with the participation of certain telecommunications and internet companies, has conducted surveillance and intelligence-gathering programs that collect certain data about the telephone and internet activity of American citizens *within* the United States.” (Italics, mine) Already, we see Judge Leon imposing restrictions, for momentarily he will rule out internet companies and internet activity, reduce the number of plaintiffs to two, confine the suits to the government (and draw distinctions here), ruling out that affecting private defendants (telecommunication and internet firms and their executives), and while giving the plaintiffs standing to bring suit, denying their attempt to bring the suits “as class actions on behalf of themselves and ‘all other similarly situated consumers, users, and U.S. consumers and users of,’”—in addition to ignoring (perhaps correctly given the terms of the suits) foreign eavesdropping.

Still, much to work with, if the manner and mode of surveillance can be ruled in violation of the Fourth Amendment. Yet, plaintiffs seem overly restrictive, calling only for preliminary injunctions seeking relief for themselves, which permits Judge Leon to confine this relief to the federal government alone, and only with regard to its “bulk collection and querying of phone record metadata—the latter again, presumably, applying to themselves. Long explanations for the resulting narrowing, as in why “the Court need not address” internet data surveillance activity (“plaintiffs intermingle claims regarding the surveillance of phone and internet data,” and then ask relief only concerning the latter), seem unworthy of the occasion. Again, too harsh? For Judge Leon appears willing and able to differentiate between the statutory and constitutional dimensions of the plaintiffs’ suit, opting to bear down on the latter and more consequential of the two, finding himself hamstrung, however, on the former (“the Court finds that it lacks jurisdiction to hear plaintiffs’ Administrative Procedure Act (‘APA’) claim that the Government has exceeded its statutory authority” under FISA, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. This is our first notice, with APA, of the judicial-governmental process operating in, and behaving like, a *closed system*.

He then explicitly confines his preliminary injunction to the two plaintiffs “only,” and states that “in view of the significant national security interests at stake in this case and the novelty of the constitutional issues, I will STAY [in the original] my order pending appeal.” Rather than seek cover, Judge Leon gives us an instructive historical lesson, under “Background,” detailing the initial Snowden revelations drawn from the articles of Glenn Greenwald in *The Guardian*—a courageous

act in the current judicial climate, and made relevant to the opinion (as though perhaps chafing at the bit). The very firms omitted from the scope of the decision are, along with their ready cooperation with the government, blazoned across the page. The phrase which seems to stick in his mind and recur often is, “telephony metadata,” and he turns from there to the government’s admission, because of the disclosures, of the program’s existence, including that (quoting from the Office of the Dir. Of Nat’l Intelligence) “the FBI obtains orders from the FISC pursuant to Section 215 [of the USA Patriot Act] directing certain telecommunications service providers to produce to the NSA on a daily basis electronic copies of ‘call detail records.’” By rights, that should be the ballgame, even an obtuse and protective Supreme Court coming on board.

But the more admissions, the more legislative and judicial legerdemain. Section 215 of the Patriot Act is a story in itself, to which Judge Leon subsequently devotes attention, and he shows interest as well in the bearing that the APA and FISA have fending off critical scrutiny of surveillance, and by implication, the whole counterterrorism shtick (I make fun of what is really a serious business, counterrevolution, from paramilitary operations and regime change to drone assassinations—regrettably miles apart from the judicial focus on the constitutional determination of massive surveillance, and the health of the Fourth Amendment). Plaintiffs filed the day after the first public revelations of massive surveillance, and, as part of the record, Judge Leon identifies Larry Klayman and Charles Strange, irrelevant for present, one a maverick conservative, the other, father of “a cryptologist technician for the NSA and support personnel for Navy SEAL Team VI who was killed in Afghanistan”—rather difficult to dismiss as pinko-terrorists. This is followed by the analytical crunching down, “Statutory Background, FISA and Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act, the former, ironically, passed in 1978, in response to abuses of “warrantless domestic intelligence-gathering that infringed the Fourth Amendment rights of American citizens,” as brought out by the Church Committee. Fortunately, Frank Church is not alive to see the results of his handiwork.

Yet even the best laid plans of mice and men.... For FISA did the unpardonable at and from the outset, which Judge Leon, by bringing out, obviously recognizes: It “created a procedure for the Government to obtain ex parte judicial orders authorizing domestic electronic surveillance upon a showing that, inter alia, the target of the surveillance was a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power.” Whether the more menacing phrase is ex parte or inter alia is open to debate, the first denying the adversarial process in which only one side appears before the court, government, already addressing hand-picked suppliants at the heavenly gates of patriotism, or the second, the among other things ballooning into secret courts, secret decisions, secret spying on all and sundry. Both become fully operable, especially after 2000, with Bush, and, if possible, intensified by Obama. And with the creation of FISA came FISC, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, eleven district judges having “jurisdiction to hear applications for and grant orders approving” surveillance, and FISC Court of Review, with three district or court of appeals judges, having “jurisdiction to review the denial of any application made under [FISA].” And with that, USG can’t miss—and hasn’t.

The screws only tighten further. Still with FISA: “In addition to authorizing wiretaps [keep in mind, this is part of Judge Leon’s Memorandum Opinion], FISA was subsequently amended to add provisions enabling the Government to obtain ex parte orders authorizing physical searches, as well as pen registers and trap-and-trace devices.” And why stop there? “In 1998, Congress added a

‘business records’ provision to FISA.” (Already, counterterrorism precedes terrorism.) The Judge continues: “Under the provision, the FBI was permitted to apply for an ex parte order authorizing specified entities, such as common carriers, to release to the FBI copies of business records upon a showing in the FBI’s application that ‘there are specific articulable [a word appearing frequently in these ex parte requests and proceedings] facts giving reason to believe that the person to whom the records pertain is a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power.’” When “foreign” gives way, in application and/or insinuation, to “domestic,” then we are hitting our stride. Parenthetically, the phrase “business records” becomes the entering wedge for widening the mechanics and scope of surveillance, by bringing telecommunication and internet firms on their knees to the government in obedience to orders for disclosure, cooperation, and most intriguing, *silence*.

We come then to the Patriot Act, which Congress passed after 9/11, and “which made changes to FISA and several other laws.” Specifically, “Section 215 of the PATRIOT ACT replaced FISA’s business-records provision with a more expansive ‘tangible things’ provision.” For, Judge Leon goes on, “it authorizes the FBI to apply ‘for an order requiring the production of any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items) for an investigation to obtain foreign intelligence information not concerning a United States person or to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities.’” Even the FBI’s application was made easier, from showing that the records were sought for an investigation, to, instead, the tangible things being merely relevant to such an investigation. We next enter the murky ways of the procedural jungle with Section 1861 [almost as famous as Sect. 215] “impos[ing] other requirements on the FBI when seeking to use this authority,” to wit, following the Attorney General’s guidelines applying to, quaintly termed, “minimization procedures” pertinent to “an order for the production of tangible things, most of all, the prohibition against dissemination and a correlative silence. If the FBI’s application satisfies meets the FISC judge in meeting the requirements, he “shall enter an ex parte order as requested,” called (savor the term) a “production order,” which means approval for “the release of tangible things.” The clincher: “Meanwhile, recipients of Section 1861 production orders are obligated not to disclose the existence of the orders, with limited exceptions.”

Anyone for tennis? No, this is a serious business. Hence, “Consistent with other confidentiality provisions of FISA, Section 1861 provides that ‘[all] petitions under this subsection shall be filed *under seal*,’ and the ‘record of proceedings...shall be maintained *under security* measures established by the Chief Justice of the United States, in consultation with the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence.” All three, estimable gentlemen, whose collective motto might as well be, “loose lips sink ships” of World War II vintage—a refrain unfamiliar to Edward Snowden, who has blown the lid on production orders and related practices. The practices, which Judge Leon in a separate heading puts in boldface, include “Collection of Bulk Telephony Metadata Pursuant to Section 1861,” his particular *bête noir*. When he states, “To say the least, plaintiffs and the Government have portrayed the scope of the Government’s surveillance activities very differently,” this poses no problem “for purposes of resolving these preliminary injunctions,” because the government has already conceded “the phone metadata collection and querying program.”

Here we see important connections being made between the program, its rationale, and the production orders: “In broad overview, the Government has developed a ‘counterterrorism’ program under Section 1861 in which it collect[s], compiles, retains, and analyzes certain telephone

records, which it characterizes as ‘business records’ created by certain telecommunications companies”—the metadata. (Judge Leon seems to accept—despite his use of the word “analyzes”—the government’s word that its collection does “not include any information about the content” of the calls. A dangerous assumption because reducing surveillance to mere formalities—bad as that is.) This “Bulk Telephony Metadata Program” has gone on for over seven years, the FBI having, since May 2006, “obtained production orders from the FISC under Section 1861 directing certain telecommunications companies to produce, on an ongoing daily basis, these telephony metadata records, which the companies create and maintain as part of their business of providing telecommunications services to customers.” From there, NSA “consolidates the metadata records” provided by the companies “into one database,” and its “intelligence analysts, *without seeking the approval of a judicial officer* [italics in original, which, unless my own, I do not point out, but here, for Judge Leon, the importance of the words is manifest], may access the records,” using “identifiers”—called “seeds”—to query the data base, the seeds being approved by NSA’s Homeland Security Analysis Center, a, to me, thoroughly sweetheart arrangement.

To keep matters kosher, the identifiers must meet the RAS standard (“reasonable, articulable suspicion”), which introduces “minimization procedures” stipulating “that query results are limited to records of communications within three ‘hops’ from the seed.” Even the Judge loses his cool, the “hops,” as he illustrates, potentially embracing thousands of parties: first hop, identifiers and their associated metadata over a five-year period, say 100; the second hop, the identifiers and associated metadata now having direct contact with the first set (100 times 100); the third, same circumstances, now having direct contact with the second, therefore “includ[ing] all the phone numbers that each of those 10,000 numbers has called or received calls from in the last five years (say, 100 numbers for each one of the 10,000 ‘second hop’ numbers, or 1,000,000 total).” RAS appears to be stretched to the limits of belief. In a footnote, he plaintively adds: “But it’s also easy to imagine the spiderweb-like reach of the three-hop search growing exponentially and capturing even higher numbers of phone numbers”—this said in response to the government’s constant minimizing of the identifiers and resulting spread. And he brings the extended footnote to a close (revealing that even RAS is thrown out the window): “But, of course, that [efforts to “defeat high volume and other unwanted metadata”] does not change the baseline fact that, by the terms of the FISC’s orders, the NSA is permitted to run queries capturing up to three hops that can conceivably capture millions of Americans’ phone records. Further, these queries using non-RAS-approved selection terms, which are permitted to make the database ‘usable for intelligence analysis,’ may very well themselves involve searching across millions of records.”

One would think that USG would be satisfied, to all intents a dummy FISA Court, an open sesame to indulge in surveillance, legislation designed as enablers to that unfortunate enterprise, and yet, there is a clear trail of noncompliance and outright lying, even to the Court that trusts it, comforts it, pats it on the head. Judge Leon: “Once a query is conducted and it returns a universe of responsive records (i.e., a universe limited to records of communications within three hops from the seed [to go beyond three would probably involve monitoring the communications of Martians, so generous is this mandate]), trained NSA analysts may then perform new searches and otherwise perform intelligence analysis within that universe of data without using RAS-approved search terms.” I am tempted to say that only the blind could fail to find content, pace USG, in these searches, searches which employ not only analysis but also following the “chains of communication,” which themselves “cross different communications networks” because the

metadata is aggregated. Since May 2006, “the FISC has repeatedly approved applications under Section 1861,” in which, as part of “the program,” orders are issued “directing telecommunications service providers to produce records in connection with the Bulk Telephony Metadata Program.” Under these orders, in addition to seeking periodical renewal (the record shows this to be a mere formality), government also “acknowledged, as it must, that failures to comply with the minimization procedures set forth in the order have occurred.” Which they most certainly have; example: “in January 2009, the Government reported to the FISC that the NSA had improperly used an ‘alert list’ of identifiers to search the bulk telephony metadata, which was composed of identifiers that had *not* been approved under the RAS standard.”

As far as one can tell, the usual slap on the wrist, if that at all. Only one member of the FISC, Judge Reggie Wilson, stepped forward on such matters, stating that “the NSA had engaged in ‘systematic noncompliance’” with procedures since the inception of the program, “and had also repeatedly made misrepresentations and inaccurate statements about the program to the FISC judges. Concluding that “he had no confidence [Judge Leon continues] that the Government was doing its utmost to comply with the court’s orders,” Judge Wilson “ordered the NSA to seek FISC approval on a case-by-case basis before conducting any further queries of the bulk telephony metadata collected pursuant to Section 1861 orders.” The approval procedure lasted all of only six months. Afterwards, “the Government apparently has had further compliance problems relating to its collection programs in subsequent years.” He quotes the complaint of Judge John Bates, in October 2011, here government misrepresentation of “the scope of its targeting of certain internet communications” under a different collection program, and thereby references the Wilson complaint about “the NSA’s use of unauthorized identifiers” in the Bulk Program. Judge Bates: “[T]he Court is troubled that the government’s revelations regarding NSA’s acquisition of Internet transactions mark the third instance in less than three years in which the government has disclosed a substantial misrepresentation regarding the scope of a major collection program.” As Judge Leon notes, Judges Walton and Bates’s “opinions were only recently declassified by the Government in response to the Congressional and public reactions to the Snowden leaks.” (Reactions, I might add, as in Congressional concerns voiced about massive data collection over the last several days, Dec. 16-18, at this time of writing, hardly fundamental and emphatically too late.)

I submit, the picture is clear, without the need to delve further into Judge Leon’s Memorandum Opinion (he takes up next the statutory claims under the APA and the reasons for precluding judicial review of agency’s actions, part of the tightening noose placed around attempts at rectification of an increasingly repressive system), so that what emerges is a tableau of political gangsterism etched in marble across the government buildings in Washington, no branch exempted, and radiating out through the country, from federal district courts to FBI field offices, and a compliant host of service providers covering the whole gamut of communications, rendered more potent through constant technological advancement, the more readily penetrable into the consciousness, understanding, and articulation of the American people. Here, to resurrect the adversarial process deemed too dangerous by the structure of power and its multiform sources of influence, I should like to give Edward Snowden the final word. His revelations, after all, got Americans to begin thinking, necessitating the government’s time away from its usual task of normalizing its and the society’s servitude to ruling groups and their structure of power, to directing more careful attention to damage control, in this case, the anticipation a radical sensibility might arise from the ideological barbarism sanctioning Wall Street—and the matching conditions of a

deterioration of living standards, widening class differences of income, wealth, and power, and, still part of damage control on a larger scale (perpetuating capitalism), promoting war, intervention, and the further pursuit of global hegemony.

### **III Snowden and the Deconstruction of American Repression: “An Open Letter to the People of Brazil”**

As part of his effort to seek asylum in Brazil, Snowden published on Dec. 17 this letter in the newspaper, Folha de S. Paulo (I shall be quoting from the English edition), in which one senses the strong convictions and unflinching bravery which motivated and underpinned his whistleblowing revelations. He writes: “I shared with the world [his standing “in front of a journalist’s camera,” six months before, when he had “stepped out from the shadows” of USG’s NSA] evidence proving some governments are building a world-wide surveillance system to secretly track how we live, who we talk to, and what we say.” This was not easy to do: “I went in front of that camera with open eyes, knowing that the decision would cost me family and my home, and would risk my life. I was motivated by a belief that the citizens of the world deserve to understand the system in which they live.” Would that Judge Leon had this courage, for he would have rendered a more forthright, sweeping decision. And would that I has this courage, for I would be translating these words into action.

Snowden feared “no one would listen to my warning,” but he was deeply moved by “the reaction in certain countries,” Brazil being “certainly one of these.” He does not mince his words: “At the NSA, I witnessed with growing alarm the surveillance of whole populations without any suspicion of wrongdoing, and it threatens to become the greatest human rights challenge of our time.” Would at least that Americans recognized this! Snowden exposes the doublespeak, the arrogance of US claims to protecting the American and global citizenry: “The NSA and other spying agencies tell us that for our own ‘safety’—for Dilma’s [president of Brazil, who canceled a state visit to the US in protest against NSA eavesdropping on her personal calls] ‘safety,’ for Petrobras’ ‘safety’—they have revoked our right to privacy and broken into our lives. And they did it without asking the public in any country, even their own.” The enormity of the insult to national honor—which appears to be strongly felt in Brazil, given US activity: “Today, if you carry a cell phone in Sao Paulo, the NSA can and does keep track of your location: they do this 5 billion times a day to people around the world.” Here, I should like to say, “Case closed.” But we continue.

Giving examples of the closeness of surveillance, Snowden implies the cynicism of such programs: “American Senators tell us that Brazil should not worry, because this is not ‘surveillance,’ it’s data collection.’ They say it is done to keep you safe. They’re wrong.” Followed by what most should agree is a reasonable distinction, but of course is denied by many in America, including POTUS, DOJ, and FISC: “There is a huge difference between legal programs, legitimate spying, legitimate law enforcement—where individuals are targeted based on a reasonable, individualized suspicion—and these programs of dragnet mass surveillance that put entire populations under an all-seeing eye and save copies forever.” (He isn’t buying the stated five-year retention of records limit. Nor should we.) Then, stated in utmost brevity, Snowden explodes the entire political-social-ideological rationale and pretext for America’s counterterrorism, reflecting a wisdom few in academics or the media have shown: “These programs were never about terrorism: *they’re about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation.* They’re about power.” (Italics, mine—I wish to the second or third power)

He then comes to his plea for asylum. “Many Brazilian senators agree [with the foregoing], he writes, “and have asked for my assistance with their investigations of suspected crimes against Brazilian citizens.” He has wanted to help, “but unfortunately the United States government has worked very hard to limit my ability to do so—going so far [this is a compelling example, taken less seriously in the US than throughout the world] as to force down the Presidential Plane of Evo Morales to prevent me from traveling to Latin America!” Asylum is a matter of grave importance to him: “Until a country grants me permanent political asylum, the US government will continue to interfere with my ability to speak.” And perhaps even then, his life would remain in danger, the US perfectly capable of staring down protest by and within the host country. We see here a scrappy Snowden, fully aware of the importance of his revelations: Six months ago, I revealed that the NSA wanted to listen to the whole world. Now, the whole world is listening back, and speaking out, too. And the NSA doesn’t like what it’s hearing.” Nor, one supposes, does Obama, his national security advisers, his entire retinue.

I find in this letter an unsuspected fount of eloquence, Snowden the Sacco and Vanzetti of our times, as his closing statements reveal, and which deserve to be thrown back in the face of the American power elite. Thus, “The culture of indiscriminate worldwide surveillance, exposed to public debates and real investigations on every continent, is collapsing.” This nod to what Brazil is doing: “Only three weeks ago, Brazil led the United Nations Human Rights Committee to recognize for the first time in history that privacy does not stop where the digital network starts, and that the mass surveillance of innocents is a violation of human rights.” Then: “The tide has turned, and we can finally see a future where we can enjoy security without sacrificing our privacy. Our rights cannot be limited by a secret organization, and American officials should never decide the freedoms of Brazilian citizens.” Snowden recalls his earlier principled stated: “I don’t want to live in a world where everything that I say, everything I do, everyone I talk to, every expression of creativity or love or friendship is recorded. That’s not something I’m willing to support, it’s not something I’m willing to live under.” For his pains, the US “had made me stateless and wanted to imprison me. The price for my speech was my passport, but I would pay it again: I will not be the one to ignore criminality for the sake of political comfort. I would rather be without a state than without a voice.”

I pray Brazil is listening to his words: “If Brazil hears only one thing from me, let it be this: when all of us band together against injustices and in defense of privacy and basic human rights, we can defend ourselves from even the most powerful systems.” And I pray even harder that America is listening. When one reviews the obstructions coming from all quarters toward the realization of fundamental human rights in the United States, glimpsed in the judicial and Congressional endeavors to silence dissent and the awareness of alternative ways of living, working, thinking, feeling, vivified by the actual powers of repression (no other word will do) we have bestowed for now on our leaders to implement over us, and through self-castration, on ourselves, then perhaps Snowden’s words, Judge Leon’s better instincts, the societal collective decency buried in the rubble of fear, xenophobia, consumerism, and yes, counterterrorism as a front to press for counterrevolution, will break free and give authentic expression to human freedom.

#### **IV The Cusp of Fascism**

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, Dec. 17, “A Powerful Rebuke of Mass Surveillance,” same date, follows:



All praise due The Times—and about time, for it did not take a court decision to show the USG flagrantly violated, taking on police-state proportions, Americans' civil liberties. Indeed, a symbolic if not actual breakthrough, judicially, beyond Judge Leon's findings, finally a legitimation in this area of both giving the plaintiffs standing (a rebuke to the Supreme Court) and the adversarial process (a rebuke to POTUS and DOJ, both forfeiting all respect for their bulldozer tactics).

I'm excited. This may be a break in the miasma of Obama's National Security State and his use of counterterrorism to undermine democracy at home and conduct aggression abroad. (No mention of eavesdropping on foreign leaders in the decision, but integrally related to massive domestic surveillance.) For the first time in ages, we see CONSERVATISM on the side of principle, fulfilling—as in Leon's reference to James Madison—the Founders' custodianship of civil liberties, privacy, personal freedom.

We have as a nation blasphemed the tradition of constitutionalism, current Republicans (let alone Tea Partiers) no more than gut-reactionaries—if not worse, and Democrats, including liberals and progressives, gutless in the face of Obama's grab for power and blatant contempt for civil liberties. Judge Leon is a lone voice for truth and sanity. We can be sure, USG and the Supreme Court will do everything possible to postpone, discredit, overturn the decision. We're on the cusp of fascism.

DECEMBER 23, 2013

### **Obama Run Amok**

Comparative structural-political typologies are interesting to study, for in that way one learns modesty when the temptation arises to assert patriotic nobility and superiority over all others. Is drone murder more righteous than Gulag imprisonment? Is the CIA morally preferable to the KGB (or for that matter, is Mossad)? Are Russian oligarchs necessarily worse than American oligarchs, say, Khodorkovsky and the Koch brothers, both having worked the system in their acquisition of wealth? Is the Russian nuclear arsenal more menacing than the American, particularly, with Obama, the greater allocation of funds, under the cover of START II, to modernize the weaponry ensuring greater lethality? Is Chechnya more of an abomination than Iraq, Afghanistan, JSOC-CIA paramilitary operations for regime change on a global basis, and the Cuban embargo? Throwing stones at glass houses, or glass at stone houses, actively court blowback because of the human wreckage they have created.

Emerson said, an ocean is a large drop, a drop is a small ocean, this, I believe, as showing the unified texture of reality and the consistency of behavior it engenders. A drone assassination is a small holocaust, an holocaust is assassination on a massive scale, whether that act is integral to intervention abroad or the diminution of life opportunities and living conditions at home. In both cases, we see the assault on human dignity driven forward by the impulse to degrade, punish, vilify, all as necessary to manifesting superiority. Evil is not a metaphysical but an existential concept, indeed not a concept at all but concrete practice in the service of repression.

Repression may take the form of the state-security police, or, under current liberal auspices in America, the self-imposed internalization, ideological in character, of a capitalist mental paradigm

urging on the drive for imperialism, market (if not also military, for the time being) conquest, status-seeking as a sign of moral-social arrival, and not least, consumerism—for working people, the aspirational treadmill, for the upper strata, utter abandon in the commodification of consciousness. Neither form of repression is preferable to the other from the standpoint of the authentic experiencing of human dignity—and the latter, seemingly “cool,” here waving banners which read “humanitarian interventionism,” “safety under the National Security State,” and yes, “Obamacare,” reaching the depths of privatization through the use of opposite-sounding rhetoric, is actually already a half-way step to the former, only our state-security police presently rest content with the stage of massive surveillance (and keep incarceration to the side, for reinforcing a racial design, and home away from home for whistleblowers—their cots waiting).

Do I paint a too-grim picture? Liberals, progressives too, focus on Bush 2 as the cause of social misery, from financial crises to militarism and an aggressive foreign policy. True, to some extent (as would be Obama’s culpability in suppressing that truth, closing the door on the investigation, revelation, and prosecution of war crimes committed by his predecessors. This is plural, because of the bipartisan commission of crimes going back, for sake of convenience, from Reagan onward).

At this time of writing, we can today begin looking ahead (thank you, Shakespeare) to the Winter of Our Discontents, except that now, there is no Richard III to bring the beauties of Spring, only the unrelieved march of Obama & Company toward the further militarization of market strategy, geopolitical thinking, planning, and execution, and, through cutting-edge surveillance, the inculcation of subtle fears intended to penetrate the psyche, inducing conformity to hegemonic goals, monopolization, and an habituation to social discipline through a political culture suffused by counterterrorism. Jump through hoops, as you exchange your identity for promises of safety, coming down finally to protection from the Unknown—a permanent condition of anxiety justifying an equally permanent societal groundwork of militarism.

I began by implying the revelatory nature of an emphasis on the small, because the small possesses the connective tissue with the large, in this case, a microcosm of the whole. Thus, just yesterday and today (Dec. 20-21) I noted five developments, in themselves not the complete picture, but each indicative of, as well as forming interrelated phenomena describing, the aforementioned stage of incipient fascism. Designedly in no particular order, the topics include austerity, torture, Putin and Khodorkovsky, the SEC, and drones, each, I believe, furnishing an occasion for casting light on current US practice. Here then, my five New York Times Comments, as follows:

Paul Krugman, “Osborne and the 3 Stooges,” 12-20:

Why not be clearer about austerity, rather than x in some macroeconomic equation? We are speaking of underconsumption, which, focused on, reveals social-economic policies weighing, consciously, deliberately, on working people. “Austerians” are no more, no less, than cruel advocates for a class state. Wealth, esp. in concentrated form, trumps democratic governance, in which living standards bespeak a healthy polity of debate and general well-being.

Krugman, on the right side for the wrong or inadequate reasons—the trained incapacity which is the lot of the economist, who cannot see human suffering, only GDP stats. Economic is politics in its most comprehensive sense: what kind of society its economy allows for or

encourages. Massive defense spending is an economic stimulus. Contrariwise, so would be New Deal-style public works. Which does America prefer? Regrettably, the former.

Let Krugman identify and speak about the real drags on economic performance, pulling the mask off of the austerians and defense machos alike. Unemployment affects real people, exempts however the very groups we as a nation look to for salvation: bankers, hedge fund operators, venture capitalists. The latter define Obama's economic-political landscape. I prefer that of FDR.

Editorial, "Release the Torture Reports," 12-20:

"It, too, remains under wraps." The epitaph for democratic government. NYT exonerates Obama on insufficient grounds. How do we know rendition, detention, torture have ended? Because he says so. Pshaw. Obama personally selects targets for assassination (is drone warfare any better than torture?), conducts JSOC-CIA paramilitary operations, maneuvered gigantic military "assets" into confrontation with China, enforces the embargo on life-giving medicines to children dying of cancer in Cuba—and much much more, and yet NYT takes his word that, as CIA's new Patron Saint, and the appointment of John Brennan, advocate for waterboarding as its new director, the post-9/11 nefarious practices have ceased!

Sen. Feinstein has carried water for CIA through near-eternity. WHY a bargaining session over the release of documents? WHY negotiations in the first place—except of course that CIA, by agreement at the highest levels, is allowed to run free, the loose cannon (in more ways than one) par excellence. NYT, don't hold your breath, for beyond delays and redactions lies WHITEWASH. CIA is central to American institutions. Between it and the massive surveillance of NSA, we see the Twin Agents of Death, the death of the American republic—with Obama a skilled rider, straddled over both. reins tight. Yippee.

Steven Meyers and David Herszenberg, "Freed Abruptly by Putin, Tycoon Arrives in Germany," 12-20:

Excellent article. This is not about Khodorkovsky nor about the Sochi Olympics, but about the world power configuration and whether the US and Russia (and we must include China) can live together in peace.

As an American, I side here with Putin, strange—and unpatriotic—as that may sound, as a way of seeking greater American democracy. Obama preaches freedom and presides via drone warfare over targeted assassination, in fact and inevitably the murder of little children. He uses gay rights as a cover in geopolitics to pursue global hegemony. He waves a liberal banner at the same time that America now has the widest differences in the distribution of income, wealth, and power in its history.

Yet Obama has the gall to personally boycott the Winter Olympics, and cast Russia as the repressive monster. On foreign policy today—the decisive world issue because of the dangers involved—Russia has not been aggressive. The US constantly fishes in troubled waters, Obama's pivot, his Pacific-first strategy, his nuclear modernization and arms build-up, his phony humanitarian interventionism, all represent threats to world peace.

Russia, repressive? Obama's National Security State, with NSA, the New Gestapo, makes Putin look tepid in comparison. Currently the US is conducting the largest

surveillance/eavesdropping program in human history. Yet we wave the fig leaf of gay rights to show how humane we are. I'm glad for Khodorkovsky's release. How about Snowden, here?

Peter Eavis and Ben Protess, "S.E.C. Tensions as it Examined Mortgage Cases," 12-20:

The very term "settlement" sticks in my craw, as it should in that of others. Not settlement, PROSECUTION. The record confirms what should be obvious: the interpenetration of business and government, their co-partnership, or as Masao Maryuma put it, the "close-embrace" system. SEC is a solemn farce, whether or not the revolving-door principle operates. Obviously, major firms can absorb fines, however heavy, as simply wrist-slaps. Business as usual is conducted under the aegis of a regulatory regime intended from its inception (TR's Bureau of Corporations) NOT TO REGULATE, but rather protect, cushion, stabilize, better yet, sanitize operations.

Mark Mazzetti and Robert Worth, "Yemen Deaths Test Claims of New Drone Policy," 12-21 [My reference to the Ishaq Principle—Saleh Yaslim Saeed bin Ishaq, 28, was "waiting by a gas station late at night" for a ride and was picked up by three men, all four killed in a drone strike Aug. 1]:

The Ishaq Principle has the weight of mathematical law: Kill, kill, kill, profess no knowledge of the killing, throw a curtain of extreme secrecy around the event, and make special provision for wedding parties, more especially traversing remote areas. Drone murder is a WAR CRIME. Its personal authorization by POTUS makes him a war criminal. Period. We may pretend, as is now happening, that Putin is evil incarnate, but if so, I contend that Obama is keeping up with him, atrocity for atrocity.

Have a nice vacation in Hawaii, Mr. President, as your war machine grinds on. Perhaps while there, you can review your battle fleets commensurate with your pivot, or Pacific-first, strategy to isolate, contain, and encircle (through joint maneuvers and military alliances with "friends and allies") China. And maybe like Palin standing on tippy-toe in Alaska studying and confronting Russia, you can do the same: stand on tippy-toe in Hawaii (with more high-powered binoculars) and dream vicariously of liberating your naval power and long-range bombers for an all-out assault.

Instead of killing Ishaq, why not bigger game?

DECEMBER 30, 2013

### **Democrats' Moral-Political Bankruptcy**

An end-of-year article in the New York Times, Jonathan Martin and Michael D. Shear's "Minimum Wage Key to Democrats' 2014 Strategy," (30 Dec.), enables one to foresee what the coming year will be like: deft, cautious appeal for votes on an obviously significant human issue, yet treated in isolation as meanwhile the surveillance-war machine-deregulation core of public policy grinds on, making a mockery, a study in the use of opportunistic cosmetics, of Democrats' claims to represent the people, the people it spits on as it drains the national treasury to feed

detestable Behemoth as part of a global vision of counterrevolution and commercial-financial supremacy.

Delightful. Democrats have discovered a presumably winning issue, I say “presumably,” because POTUS and the party have already so pushed the culture of politics to the Right that even this modest increase in the minimum wage seems somehow brave, titillatingly subversive, worthy of respect by the working people en masse they have consistently shafted—when in reality it is a cover for a policy syndrome wholly opposed to the needs of the people it allegedly serves. Dangle the bait (already half-eaten by living costs that \$10.10 by 2015 just about keeps things as they were) of a minimum-wage increase in front of their eyes, at the same time as a steadily enlarging crop of billionaires suck at the public teat, and you have a sure-fire formula for encouraging false consciousness among working (if they have employment) Americans that keeps capitalism—as defined by upper groups—healthy and on its toes.

Where, then, meaningful job creation? Public works? Progressive taxation? Effective, thoroughgoing regulation of banks, hedge funds, derivatives? De-escalation of the Pacific-first, heavily deployed “pivot” inviting confrontation with China? End to spying, more spying, still more spying? The list continues and adds up, to any who can transcend the societal myopia an obfuscating USG (in cooperation with the Business Community) disseminates broadcast, to incipient—if not a more advanced stage of—fascism.

Fascism in America wears a smiling face. Its moniker is, Corporatism, itself the sweetheart relationship between government, business, the military, and, increasingly occupying a forward position, banking. Why not a modest increase in the minimum wage! Class structure remains the same. Power remains concentrated and free to pursue military objectives while still preserving, even maximizing, profits. Liberalism sparkles brightly, adding a veneer to the bloodletting and malnourishment it sponsors. Welcome, then, 2014; prospects are good for more of the same. JPMorgan Chase, I toast you, along with those who keep America safe—the massive defense industry, our brave warriors, no gender-bias there, spread over much of the earth’s surface, and the whole apparatus making possible, from armchair “pilots” to faraway airstrips, drone murder, our environmental depredators, and the New American Heroes, NSA and the corrupted judiciary which supports it.

Therefore, Go Green, Go White, drown any misgivings we might have (highly unlikely!) of the human pain and suffering the US daily creates in the world, in the bread-and-circuses of our Bowl Games. For want of anything better, I shall cheer for Stanford at the Rose Bowl, having seen for thirty-odd years the complicity of Michigan State in the fascistization of America.

My New York Times Comment, same date, on the Martin-Shear article follows:

Pathetic, revealing the opportunism and moral bankruptcy of the Democrats. They speak of income inequality and “value issues,” yet under Obama have created the widest CLASS differentiation in income, wealth, and power in American history. The US has a sizable underclass, thanks in large part to massive defense spending, interventions, drone assassinations, JSOC-CIA paramilitary operations intended for regime change, and yet POTUS and Democrats have the chutzpah to talk about raising the minimum wage—a drop in the bucket for the wreck they have pressed upon the American polity.

The cynicism of using the issue for electoral gain, whilst leaving INTACT a reprehensible record on all other issues, demonstrates beyond peradventure they are no better than the Bushies and Republicans, indeed, the continuities of public policy are clear—except, going forward under a “liberal” banner makes the hoax that much more hurtful and inhumane. When Democrats begin to stand for principle, and expose their leader as a devotee of massive surveillance, China-bashing, and deregulation, then one can begin, yes, only begin, to listen to their moanings about reelection.

The party that brought you the greatest violation of CIVIL LIBERTIES hardly deserves commendation for engineering votes on the backs of the working poor, as though stalking horses so that the party and POTUS could confer still more benefits on Wall Street and the Military. A solemn farce, were it not so tragic.

JANUARY 2, 2014

### **Obama and the Left**

New Year’s Day, Michael Moore grudgingly, in a *New York Times* op-ed, finds something positive in Obamacare—not good enough, when comprehensive political-economic condemnation is in order. Liberals-progressives-radicals(?), toss out your rose-colored glasses—Obama and the Democrats are complicit in war crimes and domestic spying, indeed, more than complicit, they have valid creds as authors and/or enablers of a Reactionary Posture nudging America further toward fascism, if by that we mean, among other things, a *corporatism* so complete as to leave America an hierarchical framework of drastic wealth-inequality, military-incentivized, ideological-driven, all to the point of the globalization of American hegemony. Stukas and half-tracks, concentration camps and gas chambers, monster parades, these represent old-style fascism, *and are no longer needed to accomplish the same results* of societal conformity and, ultimately, thought control, all on behalf of a voracious capitalism never certain of absolute security.

In this light, Obama is the super-salesman promoting acquiescence in a permanent status quo, whereby the essence of democracy, the PUBLIC realm, is steadily encroached upon, falling under the domain of privatization in Alice-in-Wonderland fashion of regulation signifying its opposite, wealth-concentration on one hand, a truncated social safety net on the other. One need not be a socialist to recognize that capitalism, on Obama’s watch, is being emptied of traditional civil liberties and, as witness the New Deal, attempts, still capitalistic, at more equitable wealth-sharing, dramatic programs to assist the unemployed, and quite spectacular improvements of infrastructure, and instead, is transmogrified into the dystopian formation even Marx flinched from contemplating.

And the Left licks the hand of the master con artist, invoking Republican intransigence to rationalize a course hardly different in essentials: war, intervention, perpetuation of class divisions, monopolization, apathy toward societal reconstruction, in sum, the normalization of capitalist senescence, recognized as such, and therefore to be resisted at all costs by a political leadership holding democratization in open despicement as the means of reversing systemic course. Before, if one recalls, it was, “better dead than red,” and now, who knows? The “evil empire” lurks in the shadows—but even *that* no longer entices or suffices. The US goes its own way, no explanation offered or needed, explanation a sign of weakness and to be avoided. Obama has built up a good head of steam, 2014 promising more unrepentant aggression, more stiffing working people on

behalf of a still-more-coiled corporate elite, more double-talk about American greatness, snappy salutes descending Air Force One.

I wish I could greet the New Year on a joyous note, share the optimism that Medea Benjamin and other *CP* writers—whom I honor for having earned their stripes—have found in recent developments, but as I write I'm suddenly reminded of what Marcuse once warned about, capitalism's power to absorb its own negativity. Obama is the self-appointed champion of a perpetual-motion machine, churning out victims in never-ending display, whether women and children in far-off drone assassination, or an increasingly dispirited lower stratum of the working class facing the prospects of becoming a new American underclass. It's time to put away the champagne (those who can afford it) and get serious, beginning with tossing out the rose-colored glasses and recognizing the enemy within.

My *New York Times* Comment on Michael Moore's op-ed article, "The Obamacare We Deserve," Jan. 1, follows:

Obama may have favored single-payer prior to 2004 (then again, his expediency is so obvious, he may have calculated it was popular and could advance him in liberal circles), but from his overall record—ANYTHING for corporations—it is even more obvious where he stands today: a shill for the insurers.

This comports well with an abominable record of targeted assassination, intervention, and, now, the pivot, intended to encircle and confront China. One who has militarism in his DNA is not likely to promote a health-care system which serves the public interest. Public policy is of a whole cloth, a consistency of operation; and here, whether one speaks of massive surveillance or drones or JSOC-CIA paramilitary operations for global counterrevolution, this POTUS is hardly the bringer of glad tidings in the New Year.

Moore should present deeper analysis of interrelated policy choices. I've always admired his work, but cherry-picking any possible good out of Obamacare and neglecting the outright slaughter of BOTH single payer and the public option, is not up to snuff.

The issue is a litmus test of liberal-and-progressive conscience—and what passes for the Left in America indeed disappoints. Better the blatant reaction of the Right, so that one knows where one stands, than snake-oil liberalism, itself advancing corporatism and militarism. Obamacare disgraces the memory of FDR and a liberalism that once possessed moral stature, now dumped in the sewer of politics.

JANUARY 3, 2014

### **Patriotism Redefined**

The *New York Times* begins the New Year with a plea for granting amnesty or a reduction of charges for Edward Snowden, a good and decent start given the Establishment-oriented framework—yet failing to criticize the *totality* of aggrandizing power, repression, and illegality which lay behind and make possible the abuses—the outright political criminality—that Snowden revealed.

NYT speaks of the “resulting furor” created by his revelations. I wish that were so. But in fact, what furor? The American people, including many self-styled liberals and progressives, manifest the silence found in the already habituated to making an accommodation with tyrannous government in exchange for alleged *safety* and “freedom” to disproportionately consume the world’s resources and demonstrate near and far US military power.

Beyond silence lies tacit and, for most, actual approval, of national supremacy, itself an unquestioned goal, as measured by a unified hegemonic system in which market penetration, trade-and-investment expansion, regime change, and all necessary means of implementation, take precedence over social democracy at home—the last thing wanted, in the first place. The people, wallowing in the false consciousness of externally-prescribed definitions of patriotism, i.e., that which buttresses the ruling order, allow the commission of CRIMES in their name, including the self-inflicted wounds at home in the further construction of a class-state of widening disparities in wealth and power.

Snowden, to many, remains a traitor, because to admit otherwise, to wholly redefine patriotism as the exposure of and opposition to corrupt, authoritarian government, removes the foundation of complicity in self-serving privilege which, deliberately set in place, blinds us to the near-universal exploitation we practice on others and ourselves.

Nowadays, to be an American is to look the other way. To avert the eyes, as POTUS unleashes missiles on drones, which leave blood spats where humans once stood—or slept in their beds; as NSA in symbiosis with the FISA Court tears apart the fabric of, not only privacy, but what it means to be an individual, entitled to self- and public-respect; as international relations become subject to the promiscuous eavesdropping on the world’s leadership fueling the breakdown of trust so necessary to averting war; and, inseparable from the foregoing, as government’s loss of integrity turns its own mission from serving the general welfare, to providing all-out support from every direction—military, financial, ideological—for mega-capitalism thriving on the spirit of privatization, non-regulation, and rampant cynicism.

No wonder, then, to look in utmost alarm at the true patriot, a whistleblower who blows the whistle on fast-encroaching totalitarianism, militarism, pointless consumerism, and the concomitant of all three, the formation of an underclass, held hostage to a low-wages paradigm, but more, a warning to the rest of society that power directed outward can also—and under provocation, *will also*—be turned inward.

My *New York Times* Comment on the editorial of the same date, “Edward Snowden: Whistle-Blower,” Jan. 2, follows:

When is a crime not a crime? What are the political-moral foundations of true patriotism? Ibsen’s “Enemy of the People” is tiddlywinks compared with the enormity of USG’s moral turpitude, Obama’s complicity in if not continued authorization for high crimes and misdemeanors (for starters, categorical violation of the 4th Amendment of the Constitution), the criminal cynicism and blatant disregard for civil liberties and human rights in Washington. The Times of course deserves commendation—a true beacon of sanity in what has become a Nazified milieu of governance and the exercise of power. Hats off for that.

Yet, not sufficient. The problem runs deeper than abuses connected with intelligence-gathering. For that to occur, other factors must be in operation first. There is no longer restraint on the trespass of human privacy—indeed, privacy per se is held in contempt, not



only by a government engrossed in seeking power, power not only to satisfy a geostrategic vision of global hegemony and financial-commercial dominance, but power as a philosophic absolute in itself, yet also by a populace corrupted by consumerism and military engagement, to the extent of falsely swapping traditional freedoms for acquiescence in a cesspool of arrogance, superiority, rigid notions of exceptionalism.

It is not a crime to expose repression and illegality. The true criminals are those who create and defend those conditions. Rather than offer amnesty, POTUS should surrender to The Hague.

JANUARY 8, 2014

### **True Patriotism in Action**

Exciting news, related by Mark Mazzetti, “Burglars Who Took on F.B.I. Abandon Shadows,” in the *New York Times* (Jan. 7), concerns eight antiwar activists in the Philadelphia area who broke into an FBI office to gather evidence documenting federal spying and suppression of dissent, to be sent to newspapers for publication of illegal government activity. Betty Medsger, formerly of the *Washington Post*, one of several reporters to whom documents were sent, is out with a new book, *Burglar: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover’s Secret F.B.I.*, which details the logistics of the break-in and sheds light on the Bureau’s felonious activities. I’m sorry, but I must break into my own discussion to say that although in political discourse it is permitted to use the term “fascist,” one cannot use the terms “Nazi” and “Naziism,” as if somehow over-the-top, even when reality suggests interchangeable usage. I use these latter terms in a generic sense—not the extermination camps, but underlying political-structural practices and ideological themes which make such conditions possible. In America, engineering consent from above obviates the need *thus far* of death camps and crematoria.

Thus it is not name-calling, as I see it, to suggest a continuity of spirit from Heinrich Himmler to J. Edgar Hoover, two men of equally depraved mental-sets, and the amoral cynicism of the police/agents they lead. The common thread, unified around the practice of surveillance and a related contempt for the personal privacy and dignity of the individual, is what I shall term the psychopathology of antiradicalism. Let’s stay with Hoover, for in microcosm, he gives us a glimpse, from three to five decades previous, of what has come to pass today: Enlarged through technological sophistication, massive surveillance in the present (which must be part of any *functional* definition of fascism or, for that matter, Naziism) merely continues the authoritarian trajectory, now under a liberal manner—with surveillance at home part of the same dynamic as intervention abroad, as though USG and POTUS are control freaks committed to ironclad Order on behalf of the political economy and social system.

When, therefore, I say, FBI=Gestapo Lite, as I did in a Comment to the Mazzetti article (see below), that The Times suppressed, I had in mind State-authorized tactics, returning now to documents gleaned from the break-in, which included, as stated in one memo, instructions to agents to step up their interviews with antiwar activists and dissident student groups (among them, SDS obviously in mind) because “[i]t will enhance the paranoia endemic in these groups and will further serve to get the point across there is an F.B.I. agent behind every mailbox.” Disruption, part of what we learned from Watergate as “dirty tricks operations,” yes, but far more—and here standing

*behind* the mailbox reminds one of the Nazi block leader, especially in the intended thoroughness of coverage—the intent to strike fear, intimidate, stop dissent and protest dead in their tracks looms large. The FBI searching for gangsters, was led by the Leading Gangster in America.

We see in the earlier period, Cointelpro (Counterintelligence Program) operating without restraint, as in phone tapping, infiltrating and spying on the antiwar and civil-rights movements, even the sending of an anonymous blackmail threat to Dr. King, promising to reveal his extramarital affairs if he did not commit suicide. How many lives were blasted, faculty members fired, the Rosenbergs executed—please don't lecture to me that "fascist" and "Nazi" are exaggerations and out of place. We are indebted to the Media Eight (my designation), just as we are to Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning, for standing up to the ruthless negation of patriotism on the part of ruling groups fearful of their loss of status, privilege, and wealth, and who find a radical under every bed, dynamite in hand, ready to blow up the social order (*their* social order) to smithereens. Hence, surveillance, hence, Espionage Act prosecutions, hence, the Obama White House standing on one of the twin towers of Fortress America, the other tower—? A bit crowded, with Wall Street, Big Pharma, still bigger, Big Oil, stiller bigger, banking giantism, which leaves even Wall Street behind as it soars into the Empyrean of Wealth, protected on all sides by the National-Security State, NSA, FBI, CIA, and Big Military Itself.

From Cointelpro to Obama's NSA, itself the bastardized version of the FBI (or rather, NSA, bastard of the FBI-CIA marriage, with JSOC and Blackwater, whatever its new corporate name, as bridesmaids), we see that history in America does not change, but only perfects the instruments of inequality and repression. John Mitchell before, Eric Holder now: DOJ in desperate need of a name change, into the Department of *In*justice. Obama, however, is *sui generis*—no previous Chief Executive so nimbly and ably synthesized military power and business consolidation so well, with the financial sector now assuming the lead in the modernized version of Naziism—I don't blanch from using the word—i.e., the narcotization of the public via the rhetoric and practice of liberalism (itself, at bottom, exemplar, over the last six or seven decades, of the psychopathology of antiradicalism), rather than the concentration camp.

My *New York Times* Comment to the Mazzetti article, also Jan. 7 (suppressed, which I protested in a note to the Public Editor) follows:

Wow, first glad tidings of the New Year. It will appear harsh, overdramatic to NYT readers, but I submit: FBI=Gestapo Lite. I recall during Mississippi Freedom Summer 1965 being in COFO headquarters, when young SNCC workers had made complaints to the FBI (same time of disappearance of Schwerner, Goodman, Cheney, later found murdered), and agents came in, instead of gathering information, treated complainants as CRIMINALS and browbeat them. As young Yale professor I could only stand there, bear witness, try, coat and tie, to look somehow official.

FBI is a domestic terrorist organization, sponsoring disruption, involved in spreading lies, violating privacy, contemptuous of people of conscience, working under the cover of law to intimidate dissenters and stifle dissent. I say again, Gestapo Lite. Why should we believe, in the wake of the Media revelations, that the FBI has turned over a new leaf? Why think DOJ today is any more respectful of civil liberties than in 1960s. (When we picketed on Boston

Common in the late 1950s against nuclear testing, the FBI was present photographing each and every one as we passed.)

I'm deeply proud of the "Burglars," who give meaning to patriotism as it should be expressed—in opposition to despotic government, one that flies a liberal banner, as POTUS makes the National-Security State the vehicle for abuses, from the least transparent government and its program of massive SURVEILLANCE, to the drone assassination of far-off civilians.

JANUARY 10, 2014

### **Diverse Signs of American Decay and Decline**

Strictly speaking, kaleidoscope refers to a variegated change of pattern or scene. My usage here is rather that of a uniform systemic trend taking many different forms, a kaleidoscopic mixture of policies and practices marking an underlying consistency of militarism, war, repression, illegality, favoritism to corporate and banking interests against and to the detriment of the public interest. Yes, fascism-in-the-making, with the hierarchical ordering of the social system, massive surveillance to emasculate the right of privacy and make the public, already so disposed, internalize fears of challenging Authority all in the structural seedbed of widening class-disparities of income, wealth, and power. The militaristic overlay of public policy merely adds to and confirms this heady brew, made more palatable under the flowing banner of liberalism. I shall be blunt: Obama and the Democrats (most of the latter, actively or via complicity, few liberals and progressives standing apart) are liberal proto-Nazis, standing on the edge of the abyss, a bottomless well of antidemocratic ethos and practice.

#### **1. Sanitized Capitalism and Global Hegemony: A Political Culture of Militarism**

The New York Times provides, unintentionally, a veritable feast of structural criticism of America's economy and world posture on which to feed. Let me go back three weeks—issues of militarism, hegemony, inequality, are not time-sensitive, but reach to the foundations of, and serve to characterize, the American polity. Take Dec. 16, for example, in which two stars of its journalistic firmament (and by extension, being The Times, custodians of the national liberal mind), Paul Krugman and Bill Keller discuss widely different subject matter—my kaleidoscope in action: inequality in American economic discourse and analysis, and Putin, Ukraine, and the West, respectively, and yet each reveals a common core of assumptions and implicit diagnostics and solutions based on an orthodox valuing of capitalism against all comers—capitalism coterminous with America, at this historical moment. Call it parochial chauvinism; I call it, on the road to fascism.

Krugman laments the reaction that has set in against assertions that inequality is damaging the US economy and its growth rate. Instead, political discourse focuses on budget deficits and measures of austerity. He faults the latter two as self-defeating, retardant factors quite obviously because of their effect on employment and consumption power. Yet the analysis might just as well have been presented in a black hole or absolute vacuum, without reference, therefore, above all, to capitalism as a system of power. From there, one would immediately ascertain that inequality is integral to capitalism, as seen, e.g., through such factors as class structure, the mechanisms of

control and exploitation, having behind them the authority of law, government, ideology, and custom, and, not least, the degree and content of political and social consciousness at all class-levels (upper socioeconomic groups being far more aware of their class interests and quite adept, among other things, through control of the media, at obfuscating issues in order to prevent critical awareness and understanding from developing among working people and the unemployed). Thus, highly pertinent to inequality, and to Krugman's narrow approach to it as a systemic condition, little to no account is taken of public policy addressed to governmental regulatory functions, the relative proportion of economic functioning dependent on international trade, the place assigned to war, intervention, militarism, and their corresponding funding, and the consequences of the latter for the deficit, and the maintenance—here, starvation and delegitimation—of the social safety net.

One might add the proverbial “etc.” to the foregoing, not only because the list of abusive institutional, cultural, and economic practices is long, but also because all of the above are inseparably connected. For American capitalism even outdistances other national capitalisms in the extremes of its hierarchical class-and-wealth formation and hegemonic goals disguised as internationalism. This is why Krugman's inequality-factor is pathetically insufficient. It represents merely the surface of widespread, yet to all intents normalized, repression. What is deserving of intensive piercing critical analysis instead is simply taken for granted. Class structure? Notwithstanding the celebration of the “Great Middle Class,” one finds banking consolidation, industrial monopolization, wealth-concentration, deregulation (even using the regulatory process to foster and intensify capital accumulation—under the compliant banner of liberalism), coexisting with, and actually creating, un- and under- employment, falling wages, union busting, a hostile political climate for labor rights, naked exploitation of the defenseless, all essential to the continued strengthening of capitalism.

Authoritative mechanisms of control, an ideology preaching accommodation and submissiveness to all below the ruling groups, in addition, the glorification of war, militarism, and intervention, the creation and disposal of surplus production in the face of want at home—taking all of these, one has the perfect framework for a designedly conceived and constructed class division which is enveloped in the smoke of the great and glorious, all-inclusive Middle Class. Criticism of inequality, Krugman-style, is the gentlest of wrist-slapping imaginable, akin to Zola's aphorism that rich and poor alike are free to sleep under the bridge at night, yet only the poor avail themselves of the privilege. (Gabriel Kolko used this example in his epoch-making *Triumph of Conservatism*, which first, among US historians, revealed and grasped the significance of the interpenetration of business and government, regulation the shield behind which business enjoyed the protection and legitimation of government, regulation the essence of self- or non-regulation, as consolidation and monopolization spurred forward—in the name of regulation!)

Although taking into account at least some if not all of the foregoing factors may seem a big order for an op-ed column, these and other factors kept in mind would necessarily prevent escapism into a mythical, sanitized capitalism populated by a vast middle class feeling the pinch of temporary hard times. Yet that is where Krugman stands, feet planted (earning full academic honors) in an antiseptic landscape of hard times, the working stiff of earlier days, the working class now, unrecognized and unrecognizable, along with those still worse off, the unemployed, whose benefits have run out (with no assurance they will be renewed when Congress returns from its recess), many,

homes lost, discouraged from further looking for work—and, an inversion of the social scale, the grossest misallocation of wealth in American history.

Inequality, to Krugman, can be eliminated through technical fine-tuning, suggesting still, if he were being candid, that the distribution of wealth, income, and power would stay largely unchanged, only a slight upgrading in the upper two-thirds of the working class, with a permanent underclass not reachable through conventional means. Stated differently, what is the meaning of “conventional means,” other than the rejection of a vital public sector and government shoulder-to-the-wheel efforts at job creation? Barack Obama might as well be Herbert Hoover for all he is doing; already we see people selling apples on street corners. Obama’s perfunctory “cool” has rendered Americans’ suffering nearly invisible. A New-Deal style program of public works, everything from a PWA to remedy crumbling infrastructure, to a WPA to remedy the broken spirits of unemployed college graduates saddled with debt, would not be a bad thing—right now. The cost of how many armed drones for targeted assassination would it take, for mobilizing a corps of dedicated young people who could go into the inner city schools of America for much-needed programs of individual and small group tutorials? (In my university, as the antiwar protest and strike of Spring 1970 was winding down, and those active met in the Student Union to discuss just such involvement, when the animated discussion went beyond the building’s closing time, the university president had police and paddy wagons waiting, arresting all concerned. Still today, militarism, wanton killing, hegemony, all take precedence over societal needs. The mindset remains fixed.)

It is perhaps not Krugman’s fault that he is an economist. What a wretched lot when compared with economists of the past, who were not afraid to question power, and who did not bury themselves in a sea of numbers (Marcuse sagely remarked, “Mathematics qua mathematics, is inhumane,” the emphasis on the last, to show how quantification rode roughshod over human suffering) in efforts at protection and self-promotion lest their evidence and analysis expose the workings and myriad dysfunctions of capitalism. Hence, inequality—not to single out Krugman, who is quite typical of perhaps the second most notorious profession (apologies to prostitution, which in light of the military, intelligence, and corporate communities, deserves better)—is not, and cannot be, a moral question for economists. For, beyond their trained incapacity to feel the suffering of others, any moral admission of capitalist failings would lead to the criticism of capitalism per se—the ticket to academic oblivion, with no return.

One stays within, even exalts, the dominant frame of reference and gingerly moves some of the chess pieces around, careful not to disturb king, queen, rook, knight, or even bishop, the last-named coming in handy through contributing to the proper spirit of reverence for the overall system, especially coupled with the knight, able to break heads not already bowed. Krugman fails to recognize, pointing to deregulation and deficit reduction as the two culprits principally accounting for the system’s lack of sufficiently accelerated recovery, that both are interrelated, rock-bottom economic strategies to ensure the status-quo maintenance if not also intensification of class-structure inequities. Deregulation yields corporate giantism, deficit reduction yields the smashing of the social safety net: Capitalism emerges in all of its hierarchical splendor, opposition to which is not to be effective through cosmetic patchwork (he now and throughout his writings is strangely bereft of fundamental solutions, even within capitalism, such as massive public works, as in the New Deal, or decisive antitrust remedies for the financial and industrial sectors).

My New York Times Comment on Paul Krugman's article, "Why Inequality Matters," Dec. 16, follows:

Prof. Krugman, after a tortuous discussion of inequality which never once mentions the working class or the poor, merely, as usual, the middle class, the 90%, making a mockery of the actual lines of stratification, and its consequences for education, employment, living standards, he then hoists himself on his own petard with the absurd charge directed to others that applies so aptly to himself: "the desire of some pundits to depoliticize our economic discourse, to make it technocratic and nonpartisan."

He does exactly that. How better depoliticize our economic discourse than never refer to CAPITALISM, its systemic attributes, its internal power structure, its incumbent needs in foreign policy, and, pertaining—as do the others—specifically to America, the huge elephant in the room producing massive distortions in the system, militarism and outlandish military outlays? How better make it technocratic and nonpartisan, than by the imprecision of the discussion of inequality by being intellectually too lazy or unwilling to connect deregulation and austerity, as though fortuitous or by coincidence? And by implying the blackhearted Republicans and shining-knight Democrats, when BOTH are equally culpable, a bipartisan consensus, in maintaining the existing structure of power?

Krugman, c. 2013, personifies the field of economics, a field that would hardly pass muster a half-century and more ago, when economists were not afraid to discuss class and power.

Turning next to Keller (more briefly), one queries, what does Krugman's rather naked apologia for capitalism have in common with Keller's attack on Putin, Russia, and their presumed rejection of the West? Although the issue here is Putin and Russia's resistance to Ukraine's joining the European Union and protesters' desire to embrace its values, it is not hard to see that, for Keller, the West, beyond the EU, is really America in its capitalistic radiance of opportunity, freedom, and—the particular litmus test of democracy—honoring gay rights, which Putin and other Russians quoted detest and oppose. For Keller, again particularly the latter, on which his article appears transfixed, the position on gays is seen as revelatory of an Old-Russia mental slough, backwater of prejudice, zealously puritanical. Strangely, it's also seen as revelatory of Stalinism (perhaps, in his book, Putin's alter ego), and hence, not Mother Russia so much as modern repression. Either way, Putin is sunk.

I cannot value gay rights as the defining moment in democratic world history, especially in holding that it trumps, when evaluating US society, a record of intervention, armed-drone assassination, paramilitary operations for counterrevolutionary ends, as though secondary considerations, nor for that matter, the structure of impoverishment, alienation, consumerism, or false consciousness. But that is an issue on which there can be honest differences, provided, of course, such discussion is predicated on the demand there be an end to all social discrimination and full commitment to civil liberties. Here I would say that, all things considered, neither Russia nor America is the Promised Land, democracy meaningful to human potentiality and the enjoyment of intellectual and political freedom not obstructed by the management of ideology and political culture. Keller is so bent on demonizing Putin that he cannot see that Obama is no Mandela, no Dr. King, no Paul Robeson, but an opportunistic, self-serving, prevaricating political figure anxious to

ingratiate himself with the upper reaches of capitalist wealth, arrogant, with no regard for the people who elected him, and, to boot, totally camouflaged, hidden in, surrounded by, absolute secretiveness—the archetype of one who has something to hide. I doubt that Putin is any worse.

My NYT Comment on Keller’s op-ed piece, “Russia vs. Europe,” same date, follows:

Mr. Keller, try as he may to make Putin into Stalin, Russia into the Soviet Union, succeeds instead in sounding, along with POTUS, the drum beats of, if not war, then confrontation. US hegemonic claims have so saturated the atmosphere as to re-create a Cold War climate, perhaps for no other reason than to ward off the decline of American capitalism in a, now, multipolar global power-environment, not to our liking or benefit. Putin’s intervention to stop Obama’s bombing of Syria hurts the sensibility of superiority of the US. But illustrative of US policy-thinking, -planning, and military execution, Russia is the convenient scapegoat, despite its significant capitalistic and mixed-economy elements, for unadorned Communism, to be used as backdrop and atmosphere for Obama’s more serious objet de guerre: CHINA.

In the US mindset, which Mr. Keller may well share, Russia and China are twin, inseparable enemies, representing everything we detest and, perhaps underlying that, fear. In his column, Mr. Keller makes gay rights the sine qua non of freedom, and that which proves Russia’s authoritarianism. O.K. But in my book, Obama’s drone assassinations, the huge military budgets dwarfing the social safety net, the obscene maldistribution of wealth in America, are far more indicative of a failed social order than the status of gays, or even, his other beef, the puritanism of social values.

WHY must America remake the world—period, but also, over in its own image?

## 2. Self-Degradation of Liberalism: Endless Variety of Sameness

Coming to the present, the first week of 2014, we see further fragments of policy and opinion reinforcing the view of America locked into a framework in which such seemingly widely disparate topics—financial regulation, uncritical support for Israel, and judicial misdeeds of prosecutors—define a coherent ideology and practice contradicting professed standards of democratic governance. On the first, the departure of Gary Gensler from the Commodities Futures Trading Commission, one can speculate about the reasons thereof—personal or driven out, but where speculation is unnecessary is the opposition alike from Obama and Wall Street about Gensler’s zeal for regulation. The latter is self-evident, and in Wall Street’s case, highly vocal. Gensler knew the ropes, as an ex-Goldmanite, and hence a formidable opponent of banking operations, including the marketing of dubious exotic financial instruments. Obama never addressed the financial crisis, except to encourage further banking consolidation and continued irresponsible activities. Like Elizabeth Warren, Gensler became a public servant when that was the last thing Washington wanted or would tolerate.

My New York Times Comment on Ben Protess’s DealBook article, “Regulator of Wall Street Loses Its Hard-Charging Chairman,” Jan. 3, follows:

Gensler's departure from CFTC will be sorely felt, precisely because the Obama administration has made a mockery of regulation. Not only the financial sector, but throughout the range of public policy—a shield for megabusiness to perform its self-regulation in a government-legitimated framework, i.e., non-regulation in terms of the public interest. Liberalism has geometrically degraded itself since the New Deal and FDR, who, when challenged by Wall Street, fairly bellowed, “and I welcome their hatred!” Obama appears as a patsy for what Veblen termed the Vested Interests, except that, rather than being soft, POTUS actually believes in and presses hard for wealth-concentration leading to the formation of the American underclass.

I salute Gensler for his policies—it takes an ex-Goldmanite to know the racket, lobbying techniques and all—and also his personal make-up, from marathoner to stay-at-home dad, a combination of substance and character utterly unknown in, indeed purged from, Washington these days. No offense to pygmies, but present-day regulators, and their Boss, are spiteful, cynical little men and women grovelling at the knees of extreme wealth—Democrats and Republicans alike, two peas in the same pod of antidemocratic favoritism.

That is why Elizabeth Warren earned the hostility of Obama and Geithner alike, and why POTUS marginalized the one person of integrity who might have averted the financial crisis, Mr. Volcker. Shame on Obama, Treasury, Congress.

American support for Israel surely goes beyond residual feelings of guilt for allowing the Holocaust to occur and continue (e.g., by joining forces with Europe after the invasion of Poland, or later, the siege of Stalingrad), admiration, post-war, for suffering humanity, here, Zionism qua a crusade of the displaced persons for security in a new land, or devoted respect of Judaism as a foundation stone of religion in the West. Some of this may be true (on the level of sentiment, and political expediency in attracting American Jewry), but the US pro-Israel position has always been firmly grounded in realpolitik, at first a bastion or forward line in the Cold-War confrontation with the Soviet Union, relatedly, preservation of the Middle East as a sphere of influence centered on the world's oil supply, and then, access to oil itself, freed from Left popular forces and the confiscation of US oil properties.

But as Israel developed, and especially proved its military mettle to the US in dislodging and forcing out the indigenous Palestinian populace, along with a general posture of identifying with conservative regimes (apartheid South Africa, various dictators in Latin America) and somewhat rigidly following the American lead in international relations, concomitant with abandonment of a socialist-kibbutz vision in domestic organization in favor of becoming a Mossad-style world player and nuclear-armed military power, the US rejoiced at the special relationship. Ideologically, Washington gives away nothing. This was love at first- or at least second-sight, testified from early on by the close working relations between the military and intelligence communities of the two countries. Now, perhaps more than ever, because of America's struggle to maintain its global hegemony, it not only sanctions but applauds every abuse of the Israeli government, possibly acting as enablers for inhumane thought and practices which might otherwise not have materialized had such back-up not been provided. In any case, America's overall policy toward Israel reveals its own ethnocentrism, militarism, and disregard for international law. To see Israel is to see America with clear eyes.



My New York Times Comment on its editorial, “The Ticking Mideast Clock,” Jan. 4, follows:

Israel is determined not to have a settlement. Its characteristic mindset is obviously the militarization of Zionism and, to that end, making Judaism a State Religion. This is very different from the spirit immediately following World War II, when the socialist kibbutz was affirmed as the nation’s model. Judaism does not need Israel. It is a world religion with fundamental moral-ethical principles, all which Israel violates on a daily basis. When the oppressed become the oppressors, we have a profoundly sick psychoanalytic condition, the introjection of the crimes committed against it, now turned outward. That, I submit, has happened. Israel has left Judaism far behind, in its quest for power, superiority, expansion.

American Jewry, once the fountainhead of liberalism and radicalism, reaching a high point in the New Deal, and manifested not only in politics, but culture, and a saving remnant existing into the ’60s, incorporating true humanism and inclusiveness as part of the civil rights struggle (Schwerner-Goodman-Cheney), has degenerated into NeoCon warmongering, reactionary politics and social policy, superpatriotism, in sum, the forfeiture of all that made me proud of my heritage. To criticize now is to be pilloried as a self-hating Jew, whether said criticism is directed to Israel or US global policy—Joe McCarthy with a yarmulke, functional red-baiting by e.g. AIPAC under a different label. I shall continue to affirm my Judaism, wholly separable from Israel.

Finally, I turn to an NYT editorial which praises one federal district court judge for his dissenting opinion over the important question of prosecutorial misconduct, specifically, in not furnishing the defendant all exculpatory evidence, which might demonstrate innocence or the reduction of sentence, something to which the majority appeared indifferent. Both The Times and Judge Kosinski are to be commended, the wider disrespect for civil liberties by the courts themselves—although neither one raised the issue—being symptomatic of the deeper arbitrariness of justice when faced with government-sponsored attacks on the individual. In one case, suppression of evidence, in the wider context now prevailing, the shattering of both the right of privacy and the Fourth Amendment, via NSA’s monstrous program of surveillance—the two, I would argue, being on the same continuum of authoritarian disregard for the rule of law. This is, admittedly, but one more sign of the collapse of democratic government, but it is in the details that one must reckon the rise of fascism, and more especially, strive for the recognition of their interrelatedness.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, “Rampant Prosecutorial Misconduct,” Jan. 5, follows:

We are all indebted to Judge Kozinski. His plea for judicial fairness—here operationally, the “open file” policy—has far wider ramifications, beyond prosecutorial violations of Brady. If memory serves, Judge Leon also invoked Brady v. Maryland in his 68-page opinion on NSA surveillance, as nailing down the larger trend of USG efforts at silencing whistle-blowers. Prosecutors aren’t the only ones savaging the rule of law. Consider the FISA Court itself, whose proceedings and decisions are done in secret.

The Times, very much on target w/ the editorial, should now expand the moral-legal reasoning to the Espionage Act prosecutions as well. Is not the truth of Snowden’s revelations of Obama Administration criminality itself exculpatory evidence for honoring

rather than condemning what he has done? By perhaps carrying Brady a step further, one has reason to turn the tables: Those who suppress evidence and discussion of wrongdoing (POTUS, DOJ, NSA, FBI, FISA) are the real criminals, morally, by demonstrating contempt for law per se, and practically, by suppressing evidence (not only on surveillance, but also, e.g., civilian casualties of drone assassinations) which a democratic public has the right to know...and reign in.

The Times opens the Pandora's Box of judicial misconduct—not because of decisions with which I disagree, but, as in Judge Pawley's case, the flip side of Judge Leon's concern for serving the Fourth Amendment, for disrespecting the law itself.

JANUARY 17, 2014

### **From Surveillance to Assassination**

Surveillance is the National-Security State in its normalized practice, one which systematically breaks down the personality structure of the individual through reduction to a mere datum to be manipulated and cowed into submission. Yesterday's news: the new budget allocates one-half trillion dollars to the military (half of all discretionary spending); the reaction: welcome news to the "patriots," indifference, the remainder. American society is sinking down into the normalization of militarism, maldistribution of wealth and power, cultural banality and mediocrity. Yet consumerism, for those who can afford it, rages on—as in the downsizing of luxury models (Detroit Auto Show) to entice the young. 500 horsepower, the bipartisan reduction of funding to regulate the derivatives market, all of one cloth: capitulation to a capitalistic Behemoth who chomps on the poor for breakfast, seeks out militaristic compatriots for lunch (on the Nile), pursues global hegemonic ambitions for dinner (pivot of assets to the Pacific in showdown with China, nuclear modernization, counterrevolutionary paramilitary operations—thank you CIA-JSOC). All in all, a good day's work on behalf of ever-concentrating centers of power, the banner of liberalism floating in the breeze, formations in lockstep chanting "privatization or death."

Capitalism wages war on the epistemological level as well as more conventional battlegrounds, in this case, ensuring the fragmentation of knowledge, observation, and reasoning, so that heinous crimes can become disconnected from the unified fabric of policy-reality. Obama justifies massive surveillance as necessary to protect the American Homeland, and because he is such a dedicated constitutionalist, he wants to establish precedents so that, down the road, later presidents will not abuse the public trust and cross the line to intrusive spying: a statesman guarding the Fort of Civil Liberties from potential abuses of lesser presidents to come. Implicitly, no, explicitly, America is in danger every minute of every hour from hostile terrorist attack. At least, this is the official line.

A somewhat different picture emerges, however, from the analysis of America's globalization of power on the expansionist foundations of militarized capitalism, evident since the late-19th century policy of the Open Door and increasingly hardened into place as the military-factor becomes more prominent following World War II. Poor Britain, its out-of-date colonialism having given way to America's own Non-Colonial Imperialism, in which there are no limits, so that the sun never sets on the American empire. Terrorism, in this light, emerges as the devilish ingratitude of those who resist Americanisms, ideological, political, economic, meanwhile displaying proper gratitude for the bestowed enlightenment.

Would there have been 9/11 if the US had not erected military bases, in the process shoring up ruling groups, in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East? Would there have been terrorism if the US had not made Central Asia a pawn in the Cold war against the Soviet Union? Would there have been terrorism if the US had not compiled a record of constant world intervention, and instead applauded anticolonial and democratic forces and/or governments, from Iran to Vietnam to Chile? We summoned by our actions the monster of our own creation, but a monster, unlike the US behemoth, which, in the absence of provocation, would have turned inward to resolve its problems through the peoples of its own lands.

America needs the threat of terrorism to keep our own people in line, something for which McCarthyism and the frenetic atmosphere of anticommunism had already paved the way with much success, as in the bipartisan consensus over war, intervention, corporate aggrandizement, deregulation, environmental destruction, and denial of an effective and comprehensive social safety net. Whether Democrats or Republicans are the more devoted servants of capitalism is an open question, rhetorical obfuscations notwithstanding. To claim a constructive role in limiting surveillance, as Obama's DOJ speech is sure to do, beggars the imagination, for reducing women and children to blood spats in Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia, hardly comports with solicitous regard for the preservation of civil liberties at home. He can get away with it because Americans' thirst for superiority in the world (and within the US, similar gradations based on class, wealth, and race) has the effect of viewing others as less than human, the domino-effect of diminishing respect as one descends the social scale (except that those in America further down the scale accept the stigmatization in exchange for participating in the joys of conquest, while the victims of American suzerainty—shame on them—tend to hold grudges, and even fight back.)

We are trained not to connect the dots. From surveillance to assassination is not even interrupted by a hiccup. Nor the two, from the largest military budget in peacetime history. Nor all three from contempt for the law itself, in providing for the protection of, and respect for, individual rights, and valuing social decency above mere capital accumulation. Sanctity of property trumps sanctity of human life—a half-trillion dollar wager, and still counting, that that relationship, if America has anything to do about it, will not change. Obama is in the precedent-setting business; contrary to The Times article, that he seeks to bind future administrations to a scrupulous regard for civil liberties in the face of a persisting Nameless Terror, he is doing the same with his drone-assassination policy, constantly adding names to the hit-list as a means of ensuring later presidents will continue the operation on terms and with “legal” rationales he has put in practice. Surveillance + assassination + extreme secrecy = fascism lite (for how long in that state before congealment sets in, is anybody's guess).

My New York Times Comment on Peter Baker's article therein, “Obama's Path From Critic to Overseer of Spying,” follows (both Jan. 16):

Baker gives Obama the benefit of the dignity of office. Take off the gloves. Obama cannot be deemed a constitutional lawyer because of HLS classes or UofC teaching assignments. Nor is it useful to compare 2007 and today: Obama's record of perfidy and intellectual gamesmanship—anything for personal advancement—should lead one to see, not a transition, because of the weightiness of office, but a consistent anti-civil libertarian posture from day one. How credit him with anything, when he presides over the hit list and personally authorizes targeted assassination? How accept the lame explanations of Rhodes and

Axelrod, when the outcomes are so plain? Need we be reminded that this week the Pentagon budget exceeded a half-trillion dollars, more than half of discretionary spending? Obama is a cold-blooded pragmatist, playing up to the intelligence and military communities, while smiling to the public—a far more insidious menace to American freedom than anything for which Bush 2 can be held responsible. I expect more disclosure and investigative journalism from NYT and Baker, not the pro-administration fluff of this article.

JANUARY 21, 2014

### **Systemic Foundations of American Capitalism**

We justifiably celebrate the memory of Dr. King on this day. As CP contributor Paul Street points out, the real Dr. King has been sanitized, his fundamental criticisms of American society and policy making not merely toned down but altogether ignored, so that the image preserved comports with alleged gains on the home front and humanitarian purpose abroad. In fact, today Dr. King would be perhaps more horrified than ever as to the transmogrification of American democracy into the not-so-preliminary stages of fascism under liberal cover.

Race per se, however, is no longer the chief indicator (although obviously an integral component) of this emerging societal formation; rather, one must take capitalism as a totality into view, with economic inequality the substantive core in the normalization of hierarchy, repression, ever-widening class differentials of status and power.

Since Dr. King's martyrdom the antidemocratic context for American growth has only worsened—and his removal from the scene, and the radicalization of criticism he offered and represented dying with him, has only compounded the situation. Few voices of national prominence remain to peel away the layers of betrayal and obfuscation protecting an increasingly unified ruling class fusing militarism and capitalism via financial concentration and global interventionism.

Dr. King's opposition to the Vietnam War and his class-inspired Poor People's Campaign would seem now faintly anachronistic (although deeply courageous and necessary for his time), so far down the road has America traveled since in both the domestic if silent exploitation of all working people—evidenced by unemployment, wage stagnation, household debt, mortgage foreclosures—and a foreign policy of belligerence,, market penetration, and, yes, imperialism in its many guises, now including the blanket surveillance of the globe.

The promise of racial-emancipation and –democracy, seemingly on the horizon with the passage of the voting-rights and civil-rights legislation of the 1960s, can now be seen as a surface corrective, though important in its own right, because the underlying system of capitalism, already dependent on the military-factor as vital to its further development, had not thereby been affected, nor even touched. One might argue that intrinsic to capitalism is inequality, and, in the American cultural context, intrinsic to capitalism is racism, as the means for enforcing this structure of inequality, race providing the vehicle and example for the subordination of the entire working class.

Perhaps systems of capitalism in other nations, with greater mixed features and significant public ownership, as well as different patterns of historical development, have not fostered such extremes of wealth and poverty, but America stands unique for its puristic institutionalization of capitalism—

and for that reason, self-criticism becomes akin to treason, whether the issues be foreign or domestic.

With the above in mind, it is essential to make inequality the touchstone of societal criticism, inequality as the pervasive reality defining the social order, and the factors contributing to its maintenance and its renewal in more intensified form. This may seem like preaching to the choir—a CP audience fully aware of what I am saying. I hope so! But still, in light of present general understanding, as typified by Paul Krugman’s column in *The Times*, Jan. 20, inequality is a thing in itself, unrelated to context, discussion of capitalism strictly verboten, wholly divorced from militarism, hegemony, financial concentration as a structural process.

My point, simply, is that inequality permeates the social system, taking multiple forms, themselves integrated, because the essential capital-accumulation process requires invidious distinctions, actualized in terms of power arrangements, across the board. Savaging the social safety net, cushioning the profits of JPMorgan Chase, targeted assassination in Yemen, a resurgence of racism, anti-immigrant feeling, gender discrimination in all its phases, a half-trillion dollar military budget in the next go-around, all of these form constituents—along with much else—in the systemic organization of inequality.

My New York Times Comment on Paul Krugman’s article, “The Undeserving Rich,” Jan. 20, follows:

What must be faced, and Prof. Krugman consistently dodges this, are the systemic foundations of wealth inequality. It is not enough to point to the upper 0.1% as though a self-contained explanation and/or even indictment. The political economy that creates the 0.1%, i.e., capitalism, must be analyzed in a causational framework. American capitalism has always been unjust, with extremes of wealth and poverty easily documented from the post-Civil War to the present. What is comparatively new, however, are the changes within American capitalism: to wit, its militarization and financialization. Krugman notes the latter in passing, the 0.1% largely in finance—yet he offers no recommendations for correcting the situation. But on the other, militarized capitalism, he is silent.

Americans have suppressed the history and knowledge of US global hegemony, a foreign policy of war, intervention, drone assassination, under both major political parties. No one, least of all POTUS, will connect the dots between enormous wealth accumulation and an aggressive foreign policy, for if one did, that would bring into question the authenticity of American democracy. Exposure to truth, granted, is mind-numbing, but going only half-way, as here, minimizes the problems facing American society, and transforms criticism into a safety valve so that nothing effective is done.

Open the windows, let the fresh air of informed social criticism come in; ignorance is not bliss.

JANUARY 24, 2014

## **Externalizing the Syrian Conflict**

The social forces at play are different, but the Syrian conflict, perhaps more than any other in a decade which has seen violence and civil war break out in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, puts one in mind of the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s, whether as a dress rehearsal for a still greater conflagration or, simply, the setting for Great Powers to pursue their own agendas through using the combatants on either side in a proxy war. Syria is extremely serious business on the world stage, yet I confess, and am not alone in this regard, that it is unclear to me the respective merits of the opposing sides within the country itself. It is not enough to accept the adage, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” because both sides appear guilty of war crimes, chiefly, placing at risk, and outright murder, of the civilian population—again like the thirties, with refugees the symbol and fact of inhuman treatment.

What we do know, however, is that third-party involvement has accelerated and exacerbated the inner turmoil and conflict, in which competing religious differences, ideological agendas, and geostrategic policies and goals imposed from without, and finding correspondence to the parties within, have made Syria a living hell to its own people—and a powder keg to the world at large. Revelations of Assad-based torture and mass killings may be true, in which case obviously vitiating any claims for aligning with the present regime, but even if true, still raising questions about the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention because itself saturated by questionable practices (targeted assassination elsewhere) and motives (the establishment of a now-tighter sphere of influence in the region for multiple purposes, e.g., security of oil interests and sustained supply, foothold for protection of Israel, as part of an arc of military power covering the wider region, including North Africa and Southern Europe, and western rampart for the Pacific-first posture of containing China, naval power and military alliances in the Pacific completing the pincer-like engagement from the eastern side).

Had America been approaching the Syrian conflict with clean hands, one might have more confidence in the Obama-Kerry “diplomatic” mission of stopping hostilities (a supposedly immaculate transition plan of political democracy, the cart-before-the-horse litmus test for excluding Iran from the deliberations at Geneva II), but its aid to the Opposition, the reasoning for which has never been given to the American people, places the US in full view not only as taking sides in a civil war, but also in specific confrontation with other Powers (notably, Russia) in an hegemonic contest having little to do with Syria itself. It is no coincidence that the rival blocs are clearly delineated, the US, with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, versus Russia and Iran, with unstated implications for drawing in others to each of the respective sides.

Putin’s recent move to prevent the US bombing of Syrian chemical-weapons stocks, is neither forgiven nor forgotten by Obama, just as behind-the-scenes pressure to discourage Israeli bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities, equally relevant to the current imbroglio, also has been taken, by the US and Israel, as an unacceptable display of interest and power in the region.

In power politics, no side can be taken as selfless, pristine, on the side of the angels. Yet here, the US is far and away the more interventionist, with Russia and Iran taking a primarily defensive role, so that, as in the earlier case of Afghanistan, in which America armed and supported the Taliban against an elected government backed by Russia (really, the resumption, if it ever stopped,

of the Cold War on the seeming periphery), only to face the Taliban—and provide the pretext for massive intervention—subsequently, so today we arm the Opposition in Syria despite the fact, or even because of the fact, that it contains a seething cauldron of groups which, in the short-run, will do our bidding, only down the road probably having the same outcome of creating a New Enemy.

The opposition is no stranger to the commission of war crimes, to which we are largely silent, not does the presence of Al Qaeda therein appear to hold us back. One might say to the Great Powers, "a plague on both your houses," yet, I submit, the balance is tilting further in the direction of US hegemonic expansionism, with, in this case, Syria, the new kid on the block offering opportunity for the further consolidation of global power.

If terrorism were such a menace, why aid the forces identified with it? Terrorism has been construed in practice as the stalking horse for counterrevolution. As implied above, I claim no expertise on the Syrian Question, still I fault the government, as in the case of every major policy area, for its extreme secrecy in failing to elucidate its true position. USG and Obama have betrayed the TRUST of the American public by placing the social order on militaristic foundations. Assassination, intervention, the unconstitutional destruction of civil liberties through massive surveillance and prosecution of whistleblowers, emphasis on nuclear modernization, paramilitary operations, heightened naval power, these are but starters for a regime—yes, regime—whose collective hands have been bloodied, nowhere more so than now, under a liberal banner, in its thirst for capitalist world dominance. Call it the financialization of US capitalism or whatever one will, the Obama administration's position on Syria is that of the American eagle creating the conditions for and thence feeding on carrion—the innocent wasting away—when, instead, it could seek a genuine peace in the region as a whole founded on the mutual respect of all its people. Rather than stir the pot of hostility, renounce all claims to unilateral superpower status.

My New York Times Comments, Jan. 21-22, respectively, to the Gordon and Barnard article, "Talks Over Syria Are Set to Begin, but Iran Not Invited," and the editorial, "Another Syria Peace Conference," both provisional in character as the situation unfolds, follow:

I

I wish all sides were more forthcoming about their positions and the reasons thereof. What stands out is the US veto of Iran's participation, a move effectively superseding the UN, and therefore dangerous on two counts: the need to involve Iran in a regional settlement, and the humiliation of the UN by this power play.

Iran will not go away; ignoring it risks further diplomatic isolation, with obvious consequences for internal hard-liners. More basic, what is America's game here? Why arrogate to itself the right to become involved? Why, opposition to Assad? The State Dept. has been less than frank in describing motivation and policy to the American people.

And what is the role of Israel in defining the context for negotiations and a settlement? E.g., did the US veto Iran's participation because of Israel?

Frankly, I do not trust Kerry; diplomacy is not a poker game wherein one plays his cards close to the chest. As with so much else about the Obama administration, secrecy rules the roost. Try to piece together the geopolitical strategy: how can the US be sincere about peace

in one place, when POTUS orders targeted assassination in another? Or sincere and constructive, when the new military budget tops one-half trillion dollars (more than half of all discretionary spending)? For the peace conference to succeed, all positions must be exposed to the light of day.

## II

Syria must be viewed in the context of global power politics, which of course is no consolation to the hundreds of thousands experiencing heart-wrenching human suffering. The rubble within Syria, the silent misery of the refugee camps, no continuance of hostilities can be justified in light of the misery created. Yes, a cease fire and humanitarian aid immediately, without regard to an ultimate settlement.

I sense that Syria has become a surrogate for a renewed Cold War, some change of actors, additional crosscurrents of religious conflict, but still US vs. Russia now engaged in a proxy war, each gathering satellites in the process. As has been observed by many, the US objection to Iran's participation is worse than short-sighted, a persistent demonization which will certainly impede a settlement. Too, it remains unclear the composition and aims of the opposition to Assad, and whether war crimes from that quarter are being minimized. Assad is no St. Francis of Assisi, but one wonders if the other regional players, notably, the Saudis, are any better and have clean hands?

One despairs of the international situation, but as a critic of the Obama administration on so many fronts, from the Pacific-first strategy for containing China, to targeted assassination in several countries, to massive global surveillance, it is hard to credit US intentions here (almost a replay of Afghanistan, aiding the Taliban, then fighting them, now aiding the Opposition in Syria). Muddled.

JANUARY 27, 2014

### **Surveillance Reaffirmed**

The scene: January 17, Obama is speaking at the Department of Justice, a solid bank of American flags behind him. In the front row sit Comey, Brennan, Clapper, and Johnson, his cheering section, the High Command of US Intelligence and insurance policy for certified patriotism. The moment is long awaited, POTUS in damage-control mode to answer sporadic yet rising criticism of the National Security Agency's campaign of massive surveillance at home, eavesdropping on world leaders including "friends and allies" abroad, presumably the occasion for a forthright declaration reconciling privacy and security, honoring and safeguarding the former. He delivers instead a landmark address of casuistical slime, flippant as to content and tone in which he fabricates a narrative of American Innocence, received by a public in deep denial that the celebrated National Security State is on the edge of becoming—massive surveillance its clear indicator—a Police State pure and simple.

Subterfuge, obfuscation, nothing can hide what is happening, for America, under Obama, is on course to silence all dissent, evidenced already in the government's attitude toward, and Espionage-Act treatment of, whistleblowers. Surveillance represents the traditional methodology to that end,



or, if not an overt policy of suppression, then it is realized as the more sophisticated effort of encouraging self-repression, internalizing the obedience and ultimately fear that come from constant monitoring by a technologically adept and watchful Authority.

This primal act of social control, with a view to the micromanaging of the political culture, has for its purpose, alternatively, can be seen as building toward, the militarization and financialization of American capitalism, a perhaps new stage of systemic integration made imperative by the problems associated with an advanced capitalist formation. America may not be quite over the hill as a viable political economy, true to its ideological foundations of exceptionalism and the unrestrained accumulation of capital, but the perception of crisis is widespread in ruling circles, themselves making room for the military component, so that increasingly drastic measures, domestic and international, are coming into play.

Notably, America is in hot pursuit of global counterrevolutionary stabilization intended to maintain its status as the unilateral superpower founded on military superiority, the claimed right of intervention on a worldwide basis, actuated in practice through an extensive network of military bases, alliance systems, renewed emphasis on naval power, and the like, all for the purpose of controlling world market forces, the flow of trade and investment activities, and patterns of economic development in general congenial to American ideology and compatible with its interests. That is a big order.

Why, surveillance? And why now, in such epic proportions? There are no easy answers, although the foregoing is a start. The aging hegemon proves no longer capable of enforcing its absolute will, nor is it fully in receipt of the expected deference it formerly enjoyed. Paradoxically, the very determination and resources that have led to military superiority have also sucked the vitals out of American society, drying up the juices (in Strangelovian terms) of productive energy and wealth, leaving an empty shell of mega-banks and –corporations on one hand, a populace in straitened circumstances, facing unemployment, wage stagnation, mortgage foreclosure, and a deteriorating life-situation, on the other hand.

The latter, especially, more important than signifying the widening disparities of class, status, and wealth, reveals the physical and psychological pressures having an effect of enforced submission to authority, which in America means a unitary formation, the business system and the military, the political framework the executive-legislative vehicle ratifying their decisions.

Why, surveillance? Take no chances; furthermore, take no prisoners. As American capitalism reaches a structural impasse, declining rates of profit (except through the creation of artificial value, confined to the financial sector as emblemed by hedge funds, and the realm of government-nourished protection for monopolism, subsidies, and trade agreements), the bipartisan concerted attack on and shrinkage of the social safety net, crumbling infrastructure, deteriorating standards of education and health, in sum, these and other consequences of economic maldistribution of wealth and resultant underconsumption, it seeks through more desperate measures for gaining or re-gaining global ascendancy. Surveillance at home, intervention, special ops, regime change, Trans-Pacific Partnership, drone assassination, abroad, as the formula for staying in the ball-game.

Conceivably, if American capitalism was not irrevocably joined to hegemonic expansion in aggressive mode, assorted fears would hardly arise. As it is, counterterrorism, imbuing the populace with a war mentality, rendering the trampling of civil liberties more acceptable (if even noticed), is

now becoming increasingly turned inward, the dissenter, the radical, the whistleblower, soon the labor activist, the contrary educator, perhaps the consumer advocate, racial militant, abortion-rights defender, all ripe for candidacy as the New Terrorist in our midst. Surveillance is the psychopathology of resistance to social change and the internal democratization of the polity.

But why, surveillance now in epic proportions? For any politically sentient being during McCarthyism (I include myself here), it is obvious that surveillance was present, but qualitatively disadvantaged given the technology of the time, as compared with the present. NSA, Obama standing behind it in full battle armor, is another story. The present may be a logical and practical evolution of the past, but the leap forward in scope and application may well signify the changing position of American capitalism in the world today. Encountering difficulties correlates with enhanced domestic social control.

The “now” in our query refers to the condition of America losing its grip on power in world affairs, partly because of its own systemic atrophy (the siphoning off of social wealth to military purposes and ends; the focus on a top-heavy internal structure of corporatism, facilitating wealth concentration, distortions in the social base of capitalism—the aforementioned underconsumption—and increased business-cycle volatility) and partly because of the fundamental rearrangement of power in international affairs.

America faces a de-centered world system of power politics, rivals of formidable proportions, emergent industrial economies, even semiautonomous trading blocs, a situation perhaps magnified in US eyes by its proclivities to ethnocentrism and xenophobia, so that the former ideological shibboleths, capitalism vs. communism, no longer hold or are altogether convincing. Other means of identification have to be invented, to maintain a steeled hostility to Russia and China, the now ubiquitous counterterrorism as a generalized appeal allowed to spill over by means of the conjuring of older associations. In this context, a changing international system, in which acting as the unilateral determinant of the full range of global affairs is no longer an option, America has made militarism the chosen solution for recouping its former position—and, the immediate point, also the chosen solution for avoiding another Great Depression, a not unreasonable fear (although hardly the constructive way to address the situation) in light of current circumstances. Here militarism and surveillance are reciprocally related, not only because the latter provides the ideological climate of opinion for the former, and vice versa, but also because, in serving as an implementer of, or even code/surrogate for, counterterrorism itself, surveillance mutes the dissent over (and distracts attention from) American capitalism’s own poor performance.

What better tool in the arsenal of the demagogue, Obama the talking head for American capitalism, in this case presiding over its reconfiguration to ensure further growth via the deconstruction of the New Deal, a steadily diminished public sector, an equally steady trend of political-structural deregulation, and, the erosion of the manufacturing base an accomplished fact, greater dependence on the financial sector for economic stimulus. Militarization, financialization, surveillance: For our purposes a new form has come into being to meet existing exigencies, a Three-Headed Cyclops heralding the American Way of Strife, integrating a mature if not altogether sclerotic stage of capitalism as it prepares quite literally to wage war against all comers deemed noncooperative in recognizing, or otherwise offering resistance to, the assumed divine-right hegemony of the United States. Sclerosis is associated with hardening, in this case, the ideology of exceptionalism: the US can do no wrong at home or abroad, domestic repression and foreign

aggression as the magical formula for sustained growth, rejuvenated power, and popular contentment.

Lest we forget the occasion, Obama's speech on surveillance at DOJ before a select audience, January 17, made necessary in the first place because of Edward Snowden's revelations of consummate political gangsterism (how else describe the blatant violation of the Constitution?) of NSA and its enablers, from POTUS to the FISA Court, Attorney General Holder, national security advisers, FBI and CIA personnel, and, critically important to the legitimation of the whole enterprise of surveillance, the eavesdropping on foreign leaders, and cooptation of servers, the Bobbsy Twins, in the tradition of Cohen and Schine of McCarthy fame, Feinstein and Rogers, chairs of the respective Intelligence Committees, rank apologists for illegal operations the more venal the more salutary.

The speech is a corker, deserving more careful analysis of technique and assumption than merely the straightforward recommendations which concede absolutely nothing. If anything, Obama's shadow boxing, giving the semblance of compromise, not even the glimmer of contrition for having materially weakened the rule of law, has established surveillance on still firmer ground. His protestations of virtue, particularly when caught red-handed, as Snowden has done, makes one ashamed for America, for a political culture which engenders false consciousness in its people, and for a capitalist system which requires war, intervention, and repression, simply to operate.

The surveillance speech is an ode to inchoate or nascent fascism, glossing over the crime, praising the perpetrators, casting the invasion of privacy as the patriotic duty of safeguarding the Homeland, a new cliché in the lexicon of counterterrorism (aka domestic-antiradicalism-in-preparation). I shall term the overall setting, long in the making, but here, under liberal auspices, which makes the destructiveness less detectible yet more bitter to swallow, taking on inceptive and protean form, and hence devastating for the future, a prefascist configuration of societal development in process of near-term actualization. Interspersed in the discussion I shall include three of my New York Times Comments, which appeared therein shortly before the speech, after its deliverance, the complete text in hand, and finally, January 24, the dust having seemingly settled.

For historical perspective, I reiterate, one finds not an abrupt transformation of American capitalism, Obama some towering innovator or villain (as you please), but a century-old developmental-structural phase of corporate capitalism, i.e., a pattern of strict capitalism, fully experiencing both monopolization and industrial violence, and a floating substratum of reactionary ideology and values, but not yet explicit fascistic dimensions emanating from the structural base.

Capitalism in America or elsewhere has never been a tea party for working people, nor has America's political leadership, including FDR, and including also wartime, been immune to the appeals of market penetration and informal global hegemony, which is to say, that within certain constraints the repression/aggression syndrome (as, e.g., labor exploitation) was fully evident. Capitalism is capitalism. But I would maintain that with this speech Obama crosses the line to a more overt political-social formation in which fascism is identifiable, the blatant dissembling pressed in the service of a National Security State, militarism, surveillance, drone assassination forming a convenient cluster for seeing its transformation into a domestic police state as a work in progress. I view the speech as a watershed moment, its general reception in the media, Congress, and among civil-liberties advocates notwithstanding.

First, my NYT Comment on Lander and Savage's article, "Obama Outlines Calibrated Curbs on Phone Spying," (Jan. 17), appearing before the speech, provides an introduction to the analysis which follows. Confessedly, because Obama is Obama, and the reporters had some helpful information about content (although "calibrated cuts" doesn't cut it for me), I had reason, given his record of the abridgement of civil liberties, targeted assassination, etc., to anticipate damage control, a snow job, the celebration of flag and country. Here is my initial take which sketches a background affording one ample grounds for skepticism:

Obama's record of abridgment of civil liberties cannot be erased by whatever issues from the DOJ speech, itself, from reports, concerned with damage control and cosmetics. Constitutional law training? HLS and U of C should be ashamed; massive surveillance, contempt for privacy, drone assassination of innocents hardly bodes well for respect of the law. DOJ itself under Holder has been a disgrace, as in briefs submitted to deny detainees habeas corpus rights. Obama has dragged the Constitution into the dirt, not least via his obsession with secrecy, a secrecy whose only function is the cover up of commission of war crimes abroad, and extreme favoritism to the business community at home.

How expect changes when FISC remains secret and its partiality to NSA is obvious? How expect disavowal of surveillance when Obama's mind-set is to use counterterrorism as a ploy to rearrange the status quo in still greater favor to corporate interests? POTUS has become the chief architect of the National Security State, which, under his watch, raises the prospect of nascent fascism—ultimately, as drone assassination typifies, its fruition under a liberal rather than conservative banner.

American freedoms are menaced by out-of-control Executive Power, closely aligned with the intelligence and military communities. The half-trillion dollar defense budget, juxtaposed to a shrinking social safety net, testifies to his "leadership" and the direction of society.

Then, immediately following the speech, its full text, found in The Times, makes possible its explication, revealing content which befits an administration shrouded in secrecy and hunkered down in the fusion of militarism and monopoly capital. Obama invests the NSA with the lineal heritage of the American Revolution (an astonishing feat of his speechwriters), becoming a latter-day Paul Revere riding to save the Republic. Spying expresses, and helps to achieve, liberty: "At the dawn of our Republic, a small, secret surveillance committee borne out of 'The Sons of Liberty' was established in Boston. And the group's members included Paul Revere. At night, they would patrol the streets, reporting back any signs that the British were preparing raids against America's early Patriots."

His high praise of spying implies the honorable roots of the NSA in the American experience, more, that intelligence, with its presumed favorable connotations, becomes the surrogate for, indeed is identical with, surveillance, the object of present concern: "Throughout American history, intelligence has helped secure our country and our freedoms. In the Civil War, Union balloon reconnaissance tracked the size of Confederate armies....In World War II, code-breakers gave us insights into Japanese war plans....After the war, the rise of the Iron Curtain and nuclear weapons only increased the need for sustained intelligence gathering." Too, Patton "march[ing] across Europe" is invoked, all as introduction to the NSA: "And so, in the early days of the Cold War,

President Truman created the National Security Agency, or NSA, to give us insights into the Soviet bloc, and provide our leaders with information they needed to confront aggression and avert catastrophe.”

Having wrapped himself in the mantle of the Cold War, with an assist from the Sons of Liberty, Obama reassures the American public of his and the intelligence community’s purity of motives: “Throughout this evolution, we benefited from both our Constitution and our traditions of limited government. U.S. intelligence agencies were anchored in a system of checks and balances—with oversight from elected leaders, and protections for ordinary citizens.” Not so, however, those who did not enjoy our freedoms and oversight: “Meanwhile, totalitarian states like East Germany offered a cautionary tale of what could happen when vast, unchecked surveillance turned citizens into informers, and persecuted people for what they said in the privacy of their own homes.”

What splendid gall, for one who meets on Terror Tuesdays, with one or more of the men sitting in the front row, to plan the assassination of those on the hit list—no indictment, right to counsel, just a blood splat where a human being once stood. His reference to East Germany (“vast, unchecked surveillance”) aptly describes present-day America, and as for checks and balances and/or oversight, the FISA Court, if one were frank, is beyond the pale.

Given the realities as revealed by Snowden, a response was needed, in this case, a step backward whilst pushing forward, ensuring the continuance of massive surveillance aided by gimmicks which leave the structure otherwise intact. Yes, there were abuses in the past: “[I]n the 1960s, government spied on civil rights leaders and critics of the Vietnam War.” No mention of J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. He is equally vague on the remedies: “And partly in response to these revelations, additional laws were established in the 1970s to ensure that our intelligence capabilities could not be misused against our citizens.”

Obama makes repeated references to “the long, twilight struggle against Communism,” as planting the germ of fear of a generalized terrorism—America, forever confronting some enemy at the gates: “If the fall of the Soviet Union left America without a competing superpower, emerging threats from terrorist groups, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction [shades of Iraq] placed new and in some ways more complicated demands on our intelligence agencies.”

Hence, “Globalization and the Internet made these threats more acute, as technology erased borders and empowered individuals to project great violence, as well as great good.” Ergo, the justification for massive surveillance, and because “our framework of laws was not fully adapted to prevent terrorist attacks” we presumably had no other choice. Naturally, “The horror of September 11th brought all these issues to the fore”—issues about safeguarding the Homeland, still no admission about trampling civil liberties and creating a massive security apparatus, as well as using the climate of fear to enlarge the military budget and establish a Pacific-first strategy directed against China.

Conjuring the image of making bombs in basements, he continues: “Americans recognized that we had to adapt” to new threats, so that “our intelligence community [had to] improve its capabilities,” in order to “identify and target plotters” as well as “anticipate the actions of networks” whatever the location. Thankfully, America has risen to the occasion, Obama here saluting the intelligence community itself (those responsible for spying on us): “And it is testimony to the hard

work and dedication of the men and women of our intelligence community that over the past decade we've made enormous strides in fulfilling this mission."

This paean to surveillance opens exciting vistas on the enormous strides made: "new capabilities" for tracking terrorists, "new laws" for collecting and sharing information, expanding cooperation with "foreign intelligence services,"—all having "prevented multiple attacks and saved innocent lives," to this day an unproven assertion.

There follows the false confession to calm the waters, which, once stated and reiterated, clears the air for further abusiveness. He identifies "the risk of government overreach," given the seriousness of the threat facing America and the technological gains outpacing the laws, yet offers unspecified assurances of respect for citizens' rights: "Through a combination of action by the courts, increased congressional oversight, and adjustments by the previous administration, some of the worst excesses that emerged after 9/11 were curbed by the time I took office."

Some work remains because of the advancement of technology, leaving "fewer and fewer technical constraints on what we can do." Then, in a sentence widely quoted in the media, Obama states: "That places a special obligation on us to ask tough questions about what we should do." One waits in vain for the tough questions, including, Why massive surveillance in the first place? And why secrecy, until Snowden blew the lid? And why, then, treat him like a criminal or traitor, for his defense of the US Constitution?

Obama, still operating in damage-control mode, claims: "I maintained a healthy skepticism toward our surveillance programs after I became President." Healthy skepticism equals closed in-house discussion, agreement, secretiveness, with unspecified "reforms": "I ordered that our programs be reviewed by my national security team and our lawyers, and in some cases I ordered changes in how we did business."

The record suggests otherwise—a FISA Court rendering secret decisions, acceding to practically all government requests, and denying the adversarial process (only the prosecution is heard), as meanwhile the Office of Legal Counsel refuses to disclose the legal rationale for massive surveillance. Still, he goes on: "Improved rules were proposed by the government and approved by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. And we sought to keep Congress continually updated on these activities." FISC and the Rogers/Feinstein team in Congress have written a new chapter in the history, meaning, and practice of oversight. To a person, they are honorary members in good standing of NSA, along with the FBI, CIA, and intelligence community at large!

Finally, we see his full-court press, ensuring, even after supposedly mounting criticisms of the potential risks in intelligence gathering, the continuance of business as usual: "What I did not do is stop these programs wholesale—not only because I felt that they made us more secure, but also because nothing in that initial review, and nothing that I have learned since, indicated that our intelligence community has sought to violate the law or is cavalier about the civil liberties of their fellow citizens." Nor did he stop them retail.

Massive surveillance is taken off the table; it is hardly a violation of civil liberties, and in fact becomes necessary to their preservation, as his immediately following tribute to the people of NSA strongly suggests: "To the contrary, in an extraordinarily difficult job—one in which actions are second-guessed, success is unreported, and failure can be catastrophic—the men and women of the

intelligence community, including the NSA, consistently follow protocols designed to protect the privacy of ordinary people... What sustains those who work at NSA and other intelligence agencies through all these pressures is the knowledge that their professionalism and dedication play a central role in the defense of our nation.”

The man is incorrigible. Nothing penetrates his hard shell, from ringing the changes of patriotism (in the process cozying up to the intelligence and military communities) to presenting targeted assassination as just another day at the office: “Now, to say that our intelligence community follows the law, and is staffed by patriots, is not to suggest that I or others in my administration felt complacent about the potential impact of these programs.” No, indeed. “Moreover, after an extended review of our use of drones in the fight against terrorist networks, I believed a fresh examination of our surveillance programs was a necessary next step in our effort to get off the open-ended war footing that we’ve maintained since 9/11.” Like surveillance, collateral damage is taken off the table.

If his extended review of drone warfare is any indication, surveillance too becomes immune to criticism. Here, fittingly, he introduces Snowden as the Quisling-Trotsky in our midst, whose “avalanche of unauthorized disclosures would spark controversies at home and abroad that have continued to this day.” Obama might have added, had it not been for Snowden, his own speech would not have been necessary.

Snowden is the imputed Red Menace; the character assassination is obvious. Because there is “an open investigation, I’m not going to dwell on Mr. Snowden’s actions or his motivations,” which he promptly does, presenting him as a danger to America’s safety: “I will say that our nation’s defense depends in part on the fidelity of those entrusted with our nation’s secrets. If any individual who objects to government policy can take it into their [sic] own hands to publicly disclose classified information, then we will not be able to keep our people safe, or conduct foreign policy.”

The theme about “revealing methods to our adversaries” continues, and yet Obama publicly claims time and again Snowden would receive a fair trial if he returned home. From this point, the speech’s presumed remedies have been amply covered in the media, except that, generally speaking, they have been taken at face value as though substantively corrective in nature.

To introduce his “reforms” of the intelligence framework, he loads the analysis from the start: All agree, “including skeptics of existing programs,” that “we have real enemies and threats, and that intelligence serves a vital role in confronting them.... We are expected to protect the American people; that requires us to have capabilities in this field. Moreover, we cannot unilaterally disarm our intelligence agencies.” Too, “a number of countries, including some who have loudly criticized the NSA, privately acknowledge that America has special responsibilities as the world’s only superpower,” our “intelligence capabilities” being critical to meeting them. The skillful stonewalling on massive surveillance continues, as in this passage on critic and practitioner alike being in basic agreement, a supposed overlapping in attitude: “Just as ardent civil libertarians recognize the need for robust intelligence capabilities, those with responsibilities for our national security readily acknowledge the potential for abuse as intelligence capabilities advance.”

Do the former accept “robust” measures, do his front-row auditors acknowledge the potential for abuse? From there, it is a short step to a maudlin display of sentiment in order to gain favor: “After all, the folks at NSA and other intelligence agencies are our neighbors. They’re our friends and

family.” Their kids are on Facebook. As a nation, we therefore share “basic values” and bring to convergence questions of surveillance and privacy, so that “those who defend these programs are not dismissive of civil liberties.”

The proposed reforms, including “executive branch oversight of our intelligence activities,” “greater transparency to our surveillance activities,” and release of some secret FISC decisions as well as further declassification, with exceptions and loopholes, of FISC opinions having “broad policy implications,” are to be overseen by the Director of National Intelligence in consultation with the Attorney General, hardly independent advocates (and as mentioned, FISC itself has usually granted USG what it wanted, operates in secret, and abandons the adversarial process, USG alone being represented in argumentation).

Given the legal machinery of duplicity, one wonders how much has changed. Most egregious, Section 702, which targets foreign individuals overseas, is left to the tender mercies of the same two, the DNI and AG, for instituting “reforms,” and Section 215, on gathering telephone metadata, is brazenly defended, with slight leeway for the providers going public about their compliance with the program, and Obama’s vague claim that the use of 215 is under advisement.

My New York Times Comment to the editorial, “The President on Mass Surveillance,” Jan. 18, the next morning after the speech, follows:

Damage control, a mere palliative designed to bamboozle the American public. Obama’s speech was frighteningly manipulative, pulling out all stops on Patriotism, really, a more subtle and adroit Joe McCarthy. I have never been so ashamed of a POTUS. The editorial raises significant questions, but stops short of calling Obama’s bluff: the continuance of massive surveillance, as the most striking deprivation of civil liberties in American history. And tossing the ball to Congress is, of course, a phony, given that Congress is equally in favor of repression as his own coterie.

Who is the traitor to American freedom? Barack Obama or Edward Snowden? Regrettably, most Americans will trade their freedom for the pottage of global hegemony. Obama has us eating out of his hand, so low has critical awareness sunk in the US. (Even now, from out of the woodwork, occasioned by the speech, there is actual talk of Michelle Obama as a presidential candidate!) The speech, probably crafted by Rhodes, with an assist from Axelrod, is worthy of Joseph Goebbels in content (e.g., retention of the secret FISC) and technique (raising the specter of Nameless Terror to encourage submission to the spying regimen). This is serious. I would like to see more vocal opposition, but doubt its forthcoming. To see Sen. Wyden’s response is disheartening.

I fear for my country’s welfare.

Epilogue: My New York Times Comment to the editorial, “End the Phone Data Sweeps,” Jan. 24, one week after the speech, follows:

Tepid criticism; insufficient to the wrong committed by Obama’s scurrilous attack on civil liberties in the name of counterterrorism. The premise that the surveillance policy is ill-considered and over-zealous neglects the obvious consequences of what we are witnessing: a tremendous boost to the National Security State as an end-in-itself, opening prospects for a



police state the better to promote the militarization and financialization of capitalism. Why austerity? widespread un- and under-employment? systemic increases in class differentiation? mammoth defense spending, Pacific-first strategy of confronting China, drone assassination?

America under Obama is on the march—call it hegemony, or whatever one will, but the course is self-destructive, fascistic in direction, and namby-pamby NYT wrist-slapping fails to meet the deteriorating condition of the American polity. Massive surveillance, any way you slice it, is a direct affront at the US Constitution. By not standing up to the administration and an essentially bipartisan consensus in Congress on the path toward suppression of dissent, NYT will find that, because a beacon of press freedom, it too will become the victim of policies leading to the stiflement of free thought. Surveillance, on the scale already practiced, confirms the disconnection between USG and the citizenry. Under Obama, this is a new ball game, data-bundling being the least of what we can expect.

JANUARY 28, 2014

**Pete Seeger, 1919-2014**

Pete, your death closes a chapter, perhaps the whole Book, on America's democratic past, a past that was itself clouded with antiradicalism from sea to sea, yet still retained a measure of social caring and resistance to the forces of war, racism, and corporate power. You've seen it all, and I can't help thinking that, like many of us, you too were fooled, by performing at the Inaugural, that Obama would help America turn the corner away from intervention, business political dominance, blind hostility to whatever challenged the sanctimonious state of capitalism—yet we were all wrong. He quickly emerged as your polar opposite: vitiating every principle, cause, belief that you worked for, turning America upside down in the process through the glorification of militarism and wealth.

With your passing, the collective memory of decency toward, and the genuine respect for, all of humanity, above all the poor, working people of every kind and description, those who from life-experience and conviction had visions of the general welfare in which the democratization of power permeated structure and culture alike in a spirit of true brotherhood/sisterhood, would now be in danger, having already been weakened, of dying with you.

I think of your campaigning with Paul Robeson for Henry Wallace in 1948, your courageous stand against the witch-hunters in Washington throughout the 1950s, your instinctive defense of radicalism on issues large and small, fighting for beliefs and principles that gave literal meaning to the Bill of Rights, itself being treated with contempt by the "patriots" among us. That the causes you engaged in always meant an uphill struggle showed that America was not the land of freedom it professed to be. But at least the idea of freedom was alive and formed the ideological core of social struggle. You rode the rails with Woody; you witnessed suffering and deprivation at first hand; you gave voice to the people's deepest yearnings; and yes, there still to be reckoned with was a People, and a Land they worked and loved.

It is perhaps harsh to say, but America did not deserve you; instead it deserves Barack Obama, killer of the dream, imposter, charlatan. Instead of reaching out to others, we assassinate them in the

name of exceptionalism and counterterrorism. I know, you would not agree. Your optimism never left you, and the message of your life, and now your death, should be, Keep Fighting, Don't Despair, Don't Let the Bad Guys Win. Have we passed the point of redemption, though? Are we cursed to forever be the world leader in mobilizing, and the chief practitioner of, Reaction and Counterrevolution?

I return to the thought of Obama, the damaged goods of liberalism, the arrogance embedded in the status of global hegemony and military superiority. Pete, when you turned in your final years to the cleaning up of the rank pollution of your beloved Hudson River, my sense was your recognition that the Hudson had become a metaphor for America, only instead of only PCBs, America's pollution stemmed from other poisons far worse: military-impregnated capitalism, the deregulation of monster wealth, and an amoral cynicism founded on the degradation of all, here and abroad, whose sole purpose, it is now maintained, is to serve the American ruling class.

Pete, give us the last word, the word I heard in Brown's Church in Selma, days before the Great March, Dr. King in the pulpit, a memorial service for Jim Reeb, a Unitarian minister from Boston, murdered on the streets of Selma, we, the congregation, arms around each other, swaying back-and-forth, singing WE SHALL OVERCOME. Perhaps it is not too late—struggle, to honor your memory and all that you have done for us.

Love, rest in peace, I speak for all who may never have shaken hands with you, but are indebted to you for sharing your convictions and beautiful life with us.

JANUARY 31, 2014

### **Obama's State of the Union Address**

Coming off of a speech on surveillance at DOJ less than two weeks ago, Obama, in his State of the Union Address, its perfect complement, gives evidence of shifting further to the Right than previously, not so much by what he said (what on reading the latter, I termed manicured propaganda), than he didn't say (the continuation, as though nothing had happened, of surveillance at home, assassination abroad—and much else, all in fact, from intervention to deregulation to systemic wealth concentration to spoliation of the environment). The second speech rests on the shoulders of the first, surveillance engendering an anxiety defining the mental landscape, more effective because just at the threshold of awareness, and so, only barely recognizable as the repression and instilling of fear that it assuredly is.

Obama has the society jumping through hoops, internalizing a low-level state of fear which ensures against the creation of an astute, critical political consciousness. POTUS plays with us, conjuring up the forces of an universal Terrorism at the shoreline, to justify continued militarism, war-preparation, deference expressed toward ruling elites, acquiescence in a social policy of austerity for the many (striking at the societal safety net), government solicitation for the welfare of the few. A neat set-up, promoted in the name of liberalism.

Present-day American conservatives are rank-amateurs in the construction of a militarized class-state, conveying favors to a thoroughly worshiped business community, yet lacking the systemization which is necessary to full-blown monopolization sector-by-sector of the industrial-

financial-service structures and their ultimate integration. Main Street is a Wall Street wannabe, under the present reality, giving vent to masturbatory fantasies and aspirations of greatness, while in fact remaining foot-soldiers in the supreme march of Corporatism now wrapped in the National Security State. Obama would not have it otherwise, recognizing the serviceability of government institutions (e.g., the Federal Reserve) for the stability and protection of capitalism itself, which Republicans-Tea Partiers-Libertarians, in their mistrust of government, blind to its essential role in capitalist-expansion and –accumulation, stupidly (for the class-interests they want to represent) fail to see.

Liberalism is the vanguard of ideological-political hegemony in America's pursuit of a militarily saturated world presence—nothing short of which, would satisfy. Its own evolution, from a seventeenth-century philosophical framework in which PROPERTY is accorded primal significance (C.B. Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*) through nineteenth-century associations with free trade and progressive—for the time—measures, even to the New Deal, where it still enjoyed a favorable reception (largely because the enemies it made had been tied to differing manifestations of feudalism and the Old Order) lent it prestige as somehow on, or at least not antagonistic to, the Left. This was a glaring error, however, once it became clear that liberalism and radicalism were not on the same continuum, and that radicalism had sought to question the mother's milk of liberalism, property—and its historical context: capitalism. From that point, in America, post-World War II, we see liberalism as centrist anti-radicalism, while still treading on the reputation of the past, gained through conflict with and partial ascendancy over premodern social formations. Liberalism looks good, in seeking to break down encrusted feudal institutions, but when faced by a viable and unafraid Left, its centrism—always the primordial nature of property—strikes out viper-like against radicalism in defense of capitalism.

Thus, Obama's State of the Union Address: Hunt as one will, not an inch of concession on administration policy, and instead the word "business," repeated ad nauseam, points up the harmonization of property and the state, capitalism and government, a synthesis which provides the rationale for accumulation at home, trade partnerships, regional alliances, and military expansion abroad.

If I were a political scientist I would elevate Obama's historical stature for revealing the guts of liberalism in the last six decades, its propensity—even thirst—for war, its admiration of, and assistance to, banking leaders and their banks (Clinton's scrapping of Glass-Steagall, Obama's love affair with The Street), its absolute regard for the Military (heartfelt, yet also, to fend off attacks of being soft on communism from those still further to the Right), its belief in hierarchical distinctions (notably in showing moral contempt for the poor, evidenced by rejecting, since the New Deal, welfare foundations, as in public institutions affecting health, employment and conservation of skills, and a meaningful incomes policy. Obama has fleshed out liberalism's ersatz character, the public-relations, doubletalk unctuousness which promises transformative social betterment and delivers same-old exploitative class-relations and a foreign policy which projects egocentrism via military superiority onto the world.

The press by and large gave him a free pass on the speech. It is not worth textual exegesis, an hour-plus of spellbinding (?) vacuity, gussied up military corporatism, praise for the work ethic, and Voltairean assurances that we, in America, live in the best of all possible worlds. Hear this, toward the end: "My fellow Americans, no other country in the world does what we do. On every issue, the

world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might but because of the ideals we stand for and the burdens we bear to advance them.” (Italics, mine) Hegemonic selflessness in the cause of humanity!

Referring to a war veteran badly wounded and making a courageous comeback, Obama continues: “Cory is here tonight. And like the Army he loves, like the America he serves, Sergeant First Class Cory Remsberg never gives up, and he does not quit. (Cheers, applause.) Cory. (Extended cheers and applause.)” The Address is sprinkled with names of individuals, some in attendance, serving as a microcosm of 100% per cent Americanism—a shamelessly transparent debating trick, tantamount (as I learned from the Big Hearing following the Spring ’70 antiwar strike at my university) to the full-court press of Authority, super-patriotism on display, to drown out all social protest. It’s standard operating procedure, even now—Obama’s speechwriters schooled in the practice.

This clears the way for Obama’s seemingly unassailable peroration: “My fellow Americans—my fellow Americans, men and women like Cory remind us that America has never come easy. Our freedom, our democracy, has never been easy. Sometimes we stumble; we make mistakes; we get frustrated or discouraged.” Ta da: “But for more than two hundred years, we have put those things aside and placed our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress: to create and build and expand the possibilities of individual achievement; to free other nations from tyranny and fear; to promote justice and fairness and equality under the law, so that the words set to paper by our founders are made real for every citizen.” Surveillance and assassination, notwithstanding.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, “The Diminished State of the Union,” Jan. 29, follows:

The blizzard of hype and sugary commentary (such as this editorial) reveals the low state of American political consciousness. Obama has done more to widen differentials of wealth, income, and power (an intensification of wealth concentration) than we’ve seen in the last half-century. Yet we slobber over his false tributes to the Middle Class. Also, he has done more for the cause of militarism (which received warm bipartisan support in the speech references) than predecessors.

How take seriously the litany about peace and humanitarianism when a) he personally authorizes assassination, b) develops a “pivot” of military assets to the Pacific in order to isolate, contain, and confront China, and c) presides over a huge military budget while also strengthening paramilitary CIA-JSOC operations?

How take seriously anything about domestic well-being when he must be given credit for the widest destruction of civil liberties in American history (McCarthyism being small potatoes) with his program of massive surveillance and his use of DOJ to erode habeas corpus rights—as meanwhile he uses the Espionage Act to prosecute whistleblowers—the true patriots who expose war crimes and the usurpation of power?

Applaud the speech as you will, proclaim Republican intransigence is responsible for the Plight of American Democracy, but deep-down surely we all must know the speech was manipulation, spread-eagle oratory, wholly unworthy of small d democratic leadership: manicured propaganda.

FEBRUARY 4, 2014

## **The Curse of Privatization**

“Obamacare,” the felicitous handle to disguise corporate pre-emption of the ideological-political-structural ground which deals with what should be viewed as a justifiable, humane entitlement affecting all people: health insurance as a basic, non-negotiable right integral to the constitutional foundation of the State. I capitalize “State,” not as an appeal to isms at either pole of the spectrum, but to signify “All-of-us,” the nation as its people, not as, and in contrast to the supposed legitimacy of, its ruling class. By firmly endowing health care, i.e., institutionalizing it, with privatization as the antecedent condition, we place our lives at the mercy of the centers of profit and the structure reinforcing them.

Serves us right. Capitalism, especially as it historically developed in America, in which alternatives to its puristic organization were steadily ruled out (the Lockean primacy of property as be-all and end-all of society almost by definition—all else a variety of communism), has resulted in a systemic cohesion wherein strengthening the private sector in one area, here, health care, redounds to the further benefit of property-concentration in all other sectors. Think of it. Could the single-payer system, proven quite compatible with extant capitalisms (plural, because few other capitalist nations are as rigidly organized and ideologically defended so unmercifully as ours) elsewhere, be absorbed into the American system without affecting its whole ethos and structure of power?

“Obamacare” is at one with every other recognizable facet of contemporary US policy, domestic and foreign. Capitalism as successfully consolidated in America over now going on four centuries (even the New Deal constituted a series of emergency measures for the purpose of saving capitalism, its success allowing for systemic continuities in further wealth-concentration, despite efforts to introduce a genuine and lasting public realm truly crediting welfare entitlements) makes little allowance for what appear as dysfunctional elements in the formation (successively, I fear) of a Class-State, then National-Security State, and now, closing in through massive surveillance and the disregard for civil liberties, an emerging Police State. How, therefore, expect or anticipate an authentic health-care framework, when the social order is prior-systematized to bring together in common purpose industry, finance, military, service, educational, media, indeed, every dimension of elite centralized control defining and promoting its functional operation?

A nation does not dedicate itself to global hegemony for the specific purpose of advancing the capitalist interests of its elites, and at the same time find within its governing structure the will and desire to serve its people free from ulterior profit-considerations, itself habituating them to the glories of capitalism as the only way to address their needs. In this way, the continued privatization of health care provides the means for ideological social-control, an insurance policy, so to speak, to keep the US on course in which the very concept of “public” is dishonored and humiliated. “Public” is seditious, not only because it is associated with socialist, but also, conveys respect for the people and people’s power to reorder society along lines avowing community, peace, fundamental rights—all anathema to the present-day political culture and its bipartisan consensus on intervention and war abroad, tightening limits on social change at home.

A capitalist-centric societal formation has a well-defined core, obviously, pertaining to property, yet even more basic, that which informs capitalism with its well-known traits of competitive dissociation of human beings (not simply as a means of preventing the rise of class consciousness, but the ideological formation of individualism to preclude sharing with and caring for others), the conversion of use value into pecuniary value, and good old-fashioned, obnoxious greed, selfishness, self-indulgence, in which fellow persons become objectified, from subject to object itself erasing human identity and the respect for the rights of the individual which follow. This may appear pedantic, but to know “Obamacare” and the forces and personalities producing it, start with Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 for understanding how the health-care system is embedded in the commodity-structure of US capitalism.

Instinctively, the Republican attack (a lucky hit, for prime facie political-sociological idiocy) on Obama’s health plan is in one respect absolutely on target: namely, health care, like civil liberties, is an excellent indicator of the democratic character of a society, especially with advances in medicine and technology in the last 150 years. When such a system reeks with duplicity, and bestows on intermediaries and the providers of services disproportionate rewards (compounded through tapping the public till) for what they render by way of the public good, we begin to recognize how important it is to see the centrality of this sector for shaping, coloring, giving tone to, the overall nature of a nation’s institutional framework and the many sectors defining its existence.

Parenthetically, for those who know or otherwise have studied Cuba, one finds the total inversion of the Republican (and here I must include a large majority of Democrats, given their cowardice in refusing to stare Obama down on single-payer, as well as their wholly uncritical acceptance of capitalism, including its perceived requirements of war, intervention, wealth-concentration, etc.) position on health care, so that instead of singling it out as dangerous because of its implied welfare dimension, Cuba, and I start here with Fidel, treats health care as the very pride and flowering of socialism, a vast potentiality for life-enhancement and the actualization of freedom which society proudly wears in its crown. Cuba, with far less resources at its disposal than America has, has made of health in all its forms (I recall the youngsters lining the walls of a mid-size clinic, in Santa Clara, waiting their turn for orthodontia), life-threatening to trivial, a true national priority, with the result that prevention, significant research into disease, medical education, all prosper, as though a tonic to, and floor underpinning, how people view one another and their society.

This is out-of-reach to America, the endeavor to transcend the commodity-structure both of social relations and, just as important, how the individual conceives himself/herself. There are several basic criteria for societal evaluation (in passing I have implied that of class relations, income distribution, the individual’s privacy and freedom from manipulation, to which one could add, among others, behavioral and cultural patterns affecting the environment and climate change, and active, constant, agitation for, discussion about, and implementation of, social justice), but I come to this newly-awakened thought: Health care, as shorthand, beyond itself, for a vital comprehensive social safety net, thrust upward as a fixed entitlement to which society must honor and respect, provides the analytical wedge determining claims of democracy and freedom. “Obamacare” hardly passes muster, nor does POTUS for disguising its evisceration at the hands of interested parties eager to preserve their own profit-edge as well as the ideological advantage of not conceding an inch to the modification of capitalism.

As for his party, the members' essentially unified support and a largely bovine political base reflecting the same, it, too, fails to pass muster as even remotely constituting a democratic social force—only a thin line separating it from critics to the Right, who are fast dropping off the scale (dragging petrifying Democrats with them) into the ideological zone of nascent fascism. If Obama is not yet there, his wider militarization of the American political economy indicates his own willingness to be swept along, using the more vocal Republican opposition as cover for executing a decisive Rightist course without seeming to have done so. Why the masquerade? The liberal façade has got him to where he is; occupying overt right-wing ground, he would be one of many, and lack the accolades and stature conferred by race on him through a constituency long on political correctness and short on political consciousness.

Rather than declare health care a natural right as voiced in classical political-philosophical discourse, I simply call attention to its significance—in addition to being a measure of society's general well-being—in revealing the established priorities set by its ruling groups via implementing the structure of power. When imperialism, global hegemony, surveillance, assassination and paramilitary operations geared to regime change or, on behalf of “partners,” the stabilization of despotic government, are of paramount concern, that is a tip-off that health-care propositions cannot be qualitatively different from them, i.e., favoring capitalist measures exclusively as solutions to societal problems. No surprises here, yet the idea of interrelatedness as the systemic attribute of policy-making and execution, meets with dulled eyes and ideological resistance. Health care has to be progressive, those nasty Republicans prove it so.

The militarization of capitalism drives a further nail into the coffin of a meaningful democratic structural agenda. “Obamacare” goes only so far—single payer and public option deliberately cast as subversive elements in the American cosmology, as meanwhile space is opened for widening class-differentials of wealth and power in America which, on its current trajectory, will ensure a substantial underclass that will be underserved from the standpoint of health needs—and everything else. When I say, America deserves its fate, here a health-care system riddled with privileges above, runarounds below, I recognize the harshness of the thought, but WHAT will it take to arouse people, make them into an active citizenry who will stand up for their rights, dignity, welfare? Societal breakdown, increased misery, still greater class-differentiation—possibly none of the foregoing, so long as the human being remains a commodity and is gulled by the trappings of liberalism.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, “What G.O.P.-Style Reform Looks Like,” Feb. 2, wherein Republicans become the scapegoat for the deficiencies of “Obamacare,” follows, same date:

If equal energy were expended on Obama's plan, in which both the single-payer system and the public option had been eliminated, one could then see how neither the Republican proposal nor the current legislation was responsive to America's needs—in both cases, privatization trumps effective, comprehensive health care. Both programs have more in common with each other than either has with a genuine standard of the social welfare. Obama, too, has favored the insurers, pharmaceutical industry, indeed all who profit from sickness and disease. As much as the Republican senators named, he has betrayed the American people, putting a liberal stamp on a retrograde policy to hide its structural limitations.

Public policy is a charade, in which we see the magnification of differences over less than essential elements. Not surprising, since Democrats have shown contempt for basic rights (of which health should be considered one, as in other industrial countries), given their acceptance of massive domestic surveillance and targeted assassination. Policy is a unitary phenomenon—rejection of universal health care and affirmation of intervention and a huge military budget go hand-in-hand. There is bipartisan consensus on savaging the social safety net, only the respective rhetorical justifications differ.

FEBRUARY 7, 2014

### **A Political Culture of Imperial Decline**

Political Culture in America is not a monolith, despite my argument in several CounterPunch articles that its repressive features, itself reflecting a high concentration of political-economic power and ideological cohesion, suggest a unitary social formation in which dissent is increasingly shrinking. Radicalism is not what it once was, a hard-earned detachment from ruling-class values and the commensurate will, based on an independent, non-capitalist political consciousness, to act on behalf of fundamental social change. I admit that the terms “monolith” and “unitary” appear to have similar meanings and outcome, yet the former is not warranted so long as pockets of authentic social protest, even when expressed as ideas, do exist. But unitary is another matter: for the social system has become so predominantly antiradical (and in the world, counterrevolutionary) that the ideological spectrum is shifting steadily rightward, thereby pulling radicalism with it and poisoning the well of alternative/adversarial thought and action, rendering them essentially as fragments presently unable to make a dent in the whole (the social system itself).

That is why it is not surprising to find in America an underlying matrix of ideas and behavior translated into a unified public policy, domestic and foreign, stemming from a common source, the matrix, again, capitalism, the convenient self-description, Exceptionalism. When one sees presidential authorization for targeted assassination it is unlikely to find public works for the unemployed or the strict regulation of banking and hedge funds. Policies run on the same track. Democratization is not wanted, period. Thus, connecting the dots becomes subversive, lest it—i.e., critical awareness—lead back to the matrix in its undisguised splendor: empty of moral content, dedicated to war, intervention, markets, regime change, financial skullduggery, an infinite list of abuses practiced when the advancement of capitalism is sought.

And that is but the surface description of commonality. Capitalism, particularly accentuated in America, where even the matrix of capitalism, if we are to follow Louis Hartz’s insight, has a Lockean foundation second to none (i.e., the absence of feudalism, the absolutistic emphasis on the property right), makes of the social system linear in its historical progression, almost impervious to change, self-enclosed in its structural-ideological development—unless more decisive action than heretofore is taken. I stress this, not to dampen spirits, or slide into a mood of deep pessimism, or argue the thesis of consensus that was so fashionable among historians and sociologists (e.g., Hofstadter, Lipset, Daniel Bell) beginning in the 1950s and still kicked around in the substratum of the academic mind. Rather, my point—to beat a dead horse—is the interrelatedness of antidemocratic, repressive, and even seemingly progressive or liberal actions and policies; here, two



widely different examples of societal tensions, unrelated, if one fears staring into the abyss of what constitutes America's identity, compatible, indeed, my above term, interdependent, if one does not.

The first, raised in a New York Times editorial, "Detroit's Immigration Solution," (Feb. 6), involves a near- universal admission of failure—a major city bankrupt, fast losing population, its public obligations such as pensions thus far unmet: collapse, disaster, any way you cut it. The Michigan legislature's response, an emergency management plan, superseding the authority of local government, in effect, kicking the city while it is down, and now, the governor's recommendation, facilitating the immigration of 50,000 degree-holding savants (Silicon Valley on Lake St. Clair) to revitalize the city's economy. Whoa. There is no mention of what brought Detroit to its knees, from the flight of industry to the illegal activities of mega-banks in pedaling exotic (worthless) financial instruments, or for that matter, disinvestment in a predominantly black city (as in not providing an effective jobs-policy or vital social safety net), so that Detroit becomes the showcase—i.e., scapegoat—for the wider failure of America, too busy fighting wars, too short-changed domestically because some one-half of all discretionary spending goes to the military, to care about what happens to the polity and its people.

This is not an issue of patriotic chauvinism—caring about the polity and its people normally is the moral obligation of government. In a class-state, however, both are expendable when it suits the interest of ruling groups. Detroit emblems the America of our time, or rather, is the living carcass of what America has done to itself, and by extension, the world at large. The mental-set is conquest, hegemony, waste, sterilized killing (as in drone "pilots" sitting 8,000 miles away pulling death-wielding levers in comfort), and, in the name of counterterrorism, perpetrating soft-glove terrorism on the American people via massive surveillance. In such a context, from every which way, the negation of social democratization, how expect any just solution to Detroit's problems, and the Detroit's down the line possibly awaiting the same fate?

My New York Times Comment on the aforementioned editorial, same date, follows:

America will do anything not to face its inner vacuity and moral rot. Sure, look elsewhere for relief and for conveniently skipping over the challenges which confront a nation in decline. Never mind, the insult Snyder's plan is to the black population of Detroit, as though by definition both inferior and to blame for the bankruptcy. Bank of America and other vendors of toxic instruments that helped bring the city's financial position down go unpunished, even bailed out, while Detroiters black and white become the victims.

America's priorities are so screwed up—I refer specifically to the grotesque military budget and thirst for global hegemony—that in time there will be more Detroit's on the economic landscape. Crumbling infrastructure nationwide is one indication, assaults on the social safety net another, of the cost of world military superiority. Here we speak of 50,000 immigrants, when in fact POTUS has done nothing for domestic job creation and unemployment itself is high.

In this light, immigrants become analogous to strikebreakers, less because they will be taking others' jobs, but because they would embody the policy of further cheapening the lives of a resident population, rendering them captive to still worse treatment. Detroit becomes early 20th century India—caste system and all; or perhaps the pre-1960 American South, with blacks "put in their place."

Stop intervention, assassination, prejudgment of inferiority of blacks in Detroit, then let's see!

From Detroit to the case of *McCullen v. Coakley* before the US Supreme Court, in which Elizabeth McCullen sat at the entrance of a downtown Boston Planned Parenthood clinic, attempting to dissuade clients from entering the facility seeking an abortion, in violation of the 35-foot perimeter surrounding these clinics established by the Massachusetts legislature because there had been a history of violence by anti-abortion activists directed therein, may seem a leap of faith and logic, but once more we see the same interdependent factors at work: a social order, here primarily through the voice of Justice Scalia, superimposing a paradigm of extreme reaction, to conform to religious teachings which become code for a self-righteous, moralistic America whose silent injunction is to accept without question the ruling dictates of business, the military, the nation's presumed destiny of greatness. Ideology trumps personal rights. Abortion is made evil incarnate, woman and physician alike, subtly merged now with terrorists, a decade ago, with communists, neatly fitting the piece of the jigsaw puzzle that must be hammered into place, lest somehow becoming undone, scattered on the floor.

My point: anti-abortion sentiment imposed on others is a deprivation of civil liberties given legitimacy, if Church doctrine were not enough, by the climate of massive surveillance, the invasion of and categorical disregard for the right of privacy, an invasion of human self-determination which confronts individuals at every turn, from consumerism to the required show of patriotism. Decisions are best left to the market or to the political leadership, or to business moguls, but thinking on one's own, as also in asking what went wrong with Detroit, is subversive and to be systemically discouraged. Linda Greenhouse, in her New York Times legal affairs column, "Stories We Tell," (Feb. 6), superbly provides the details of the case and argumentation before the Court.

My NYT Comment on the article, same date, follows:

Greenhouse identifies the significance of these cases when she writes, "a claim by religion for primacy in the public square." Scalia's obvious bias speaks volumes about the degradation of the Constitution in recent years. Obama's concessions on the issue of contraceptives indicates complicity in that direction. From several quarters we see the tarnishing and destruction of justice.

As a non-lawyer I may seem illogical, but I submit that we must connect the dots: the *McCullen* case and that of the Little Sisters of the Poor is on the same continuum as Obama and DOJ's employment of the Espionage Act to silence and punish whistleblowers. Legal interpretation is experiencing a unified political-cultural retreat in which, not a conservative but outright reactionary agenda characterizes the direction America is taking. Abortion should not be the plaything of politics in the first place. So much for privacy and respect for the individual's rights; yet, again connect the dots, how is the invasion in that realm different from the massive surveillance of the American people and therefore the contempt shown privacy and individual rights by all three branches of government?

Yes, *McCullen* is an agitator obstructing self-determination, but the Court is far worse, because, as the guardian of justice, it is closing its eyes to cherished principles of civil liberties, and instead giving expression to intolerance, bigotry, and opportunistic, not to say, slippery, reasoning.

FEBRUARY 11, 2014

## **Obama's Paradigm of Military Corporatism**

Just another weekend: The administration grinds on in the service of American fascistization. We see a societal process, multisectoral in its scope, which enhances the integration of a Class-State and the National Security State. Begin anywhere, so consistent the direction and rife the activity, here, Coral Davenport's New York Times article, "Report Clears Way to Approval for New Keystone Pipeline," 2-1-14, which delineates, in microcosm, Obama's natural resources/environmental policy at a glance. Our Tar Sands President proves utterly indifferent to climate change, spoliation of the land, endangerment of aquifers, contrariwise, his solicitous regard for megacapitalist schemes in general, oil companies in particular, using the hiring of workers on the Keystone project as a pretext for running roughshod over critics of the scam.

I say "scam" because, at the outset, the environmental dangers were lightly brushed over by an environmental impact study, commissioned by Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State (the pipeline would cross international boundaries, and hence, fall under her jurisdiction), in which the firm chosen to conduct it listed TransCanada in its publicity as among its principal clients. Of course, conflict of interest is standard procedure in such cases. More important, however, in justifying the project, Obama invoked the theme of America's energy independence, even though the pipeline would make a beeline to Galveston, where the oil would be shipped out to foreign markets.

Davenport's article does not make reference to these points, but it does alert us to the campaign for acceptance. What must be said, in addition, is that Obama has staked out polemical-ideological ground designed to further ingratiate him with the business community, a highly visible policy which offers assurance that he values their esteem and is interested in their welfare. With Keystone, so transparent a case of right-or-wrong public policy, from the standpoint not only of climate change, environmental degradation, and influence peddling, but also the democratization of power and efficacy of regulation in the public interest, POTUS proves himself capitalism's front man extraordinaire. His utility to the cause goes well beyond that of his predecessor, for by waving a liberal banner he assuages all doubts about impartial, democratic leadership—and we suckers have been taken in, on far more than Keystone, even to the extent of becoming conditioned not to connect the dots of what is surely a unified framework of advancing corporate interests.

Keystone XL = TransPacific Partnership = a record high military budget=massive domestic surveillance (in part, as social control one step removed, to ensure agreement with, and a sense of powerlessness to oppose, both domestic and foreign policy of a corporate and/or military nature) = intervention and regime change = here, you fill in the blank for what the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture, Interior, indeed, the whole Cabinet, do on a 24/7 basis in feathering the corporate nest, solidifying American capitalism's international position, and fending off an independent regulatory regime intended to protect the public interest.

The framework of integrated power, modeled as the structure of interpenetration between government and business, therefore, displays a consistency of purpose which becomes interrelated with, and furnishes the sparkplug for, fundamental public policy, as the foundation for the nation's war-making proclivities and prowess. Business trumps the environment. It also serves as the organizing principle for mounting hegemonic claims on the world—the environment being merely one more casualty in the pell-mell rush to power.

My NYT Comment on the Davenport article, same date, follows:

The environmental impact study commissioned by the State Department (which has jurisdiction because of the border crossing) has received widespread UNCRITICAL coverage, as though fully justifying Keystone XL. Yet it had been earlier revealed that the firm conducting the study had featured TransCanada as one of its leading clients. This is Obama's duplicity in high gear—initial stall tactics, an implicit argument for Energy Independence (however, shipment to Galveston for exporting overseas, having therefore nothing to do with independence), and now, first criticisms of a conflict of interest in State's selection largely forgotten, a push to the finish line!

Should there be a pipeline leak in the fragile aquifer, we will see damage far exceeding what normally falls under climate change. We will also see the depths of cynicism and betrayal of our national leaders. Environmentalists, despite good intentions, are over their heads where Big Oil is concerned—and also far too trusting when they look to Secretary Kerry for help.

Keystone XL is a domestic equivalent of targeted assassination in foreign affairs, revealing the utter debasement of government policy, callous of all humanitarian considerations. The least one might hope from the media is exposure of the bias inherent in the impact study, knowingly commissioned by Kerry's predecessor, Mrs. Clinton.

A second indication this past weekend of Obama's aggressive push on the corporate-military front can be seen in The Times's article by David Sanger and Thom Shanker, "N.S.A. Choice Is Navy Expert on Cyberwar," 1-31-14. Here, with this appointment, Obama enlarges the nation's electronics-capability cum massive surveillance and foreign eavesdropping by adding, as the logical corollary to governmental intrusion into the fabric of social communication, the specifically provocative tactic of real and potential cyber warfare in which the sky's the limit on targeting objectives.

From surveillance at home to active disruption abroad hardly requires skipping a beat. In Admiral Rogers, his appointee, Obama has picked a sure winner, technologically adept, no reservations on the totality of the NSA mission, and, through keeping a federal agency firmly under military rather than civilian leadership, drawing still closer to the military and intelligence communities and thereby further endowing his administration with a military cast and purpose.

This has implications for how surveillance itself will be conceived and perhaps conducted as well as the feasibility of cyberwarfare, in both cases a militarization of intelligence creating a mindset less apt to be restrained by considerations, whether of peace or the rule of law. For Obama, this is just right, given his comfort level with NSA and his record on a parallel front, CIA/JSOC paramilitary operations, together a complementary package in that pressing ahead for America's global objectives while preserving order at home.

NSA is the negation of democracy by supplying the cover and the means for attempting universal social control at home to ensure the safety of capitalism. It also has an aggressive function overseas, the negation of international comity and understanding through its "capabilities" (a much-used term in the administration's evaluation of its arsenal of weapons, programs, strategies, all to hegemonic purpose) for spying and sabotage. Privacy, once the cornerstone of individual rights honored across the political spectrum, has now become an object of derision in national-security

circles and regarded, by extension, as anticapitalist. Massive surveillance signals the self-devouring aspect of capitalism and the National-Security State. (Lenin might say, Obama is doing his work for him.) Cyberwarfare adds the proper touch of scorn for the rules of the game and the opinion of others.

My NYT Comment on the Sanger-Shanker article, same date, follows:

Adm. Rogers is the ideal man for the job, in charge of cyberwarfare dear to the heart of Obama, whose record on civil liberties is worse than any president since the Alien and Sedition Acts of the Founders. POTUS rubs excrement in the face of the American people, disregarding even the moderate recommendations of his own panel—his contempt for the rule of law, joined by such luminaries as James Clapper and Eric Holder, has made of the US a National-Security State verging on, if not already there, the well-known features of a Police State. Nothing in his DOJ speech on surveillance (Jan. 17) nor this week's State of the Union Address indicates the slightest doubt about the program of domestic massive surveillance! That Obama was immersed in the wonders of cyberattacks (Olympic Games) confirms, along with this appointment, his disregard for traditional principles of law, privacy, and civil liberties. And in the background, yes, always appoint a military over a civilian person, and ingratiate yourself still further with the military and intelligence communities. Obama is the liberal public relations version of Joe McCarthy, only with far more firepower (literally) at his disposal. I fear for the fate of the Republic.

A third sign or fingerprint of deepening Reaction in American policy, again, over the weekend, is the US posture in the Middle East. Support for Israel is a foregone conclusion, as is the necessity for protecting a sustained supply of oil and protecting the interests of American oil companies. This is so plain as not to warrant comment. What isn't plain, perhaps, is the larger geopolitical-geostrategic picture, in which America, especially in light of the challenge initially posed by the Arab Spring, and now, the presumed hatchery for terrorist groups, consciously, or still haltingly, is coming to see the region as an imperative sphere of interest in addressing the problems of Great Power rivalries. Neither Israel nor oil is thereby neglected, just that the war-national security establishment is proving capable of multitasking and can appreciate the region as a valued center for renewing the Cold War (China as well as Russia in the cross-hairs) and keeping an eye on developments covering a wide swath of territory.

Next, then, we have Roger Cohen's article in The Times, "A Middle Eastern Primer," 1-31-14, brilliantly, I think, cataloguing the regional tensions, so that one can take the administration directly into foreign policy, although, that said, I believe he misses the wider importance of the US role in the Middle East. Although Israel and oil remain central, Obama provides a geopolitical dimension less sharply articulated, if at all, by his predecessors: the Middle East as the spearhead for projecting American power outward in every direction.

If it appears too glib to speak of a Second Cold War, his endeavor in this regard turns on placing both Russia and China within a reconstituted, militarized sphere of interest. Recent events, the planned US bombing of Syria, nullified by Putin's intervention, speaks for rising US-Russian tensions (aided by America's deep historical-cultural lag, in which Russia seems still to be regarded in terms of revolutionary socialism, itself mind-boggling), while, also inherited from Cold-War

thinking, China still is Red China, despite obvious political-structural changes, only, unlike Russia, viewed as a more imposing challenge because of its commercial-industrial development.

In both cases, Obama is in confrontation-mode, even though the ideological factor long-ago disappeared (or should have, from the standpoint of nuclear annihilation or global conflict, if ever deserving weight in the first place). Global hegemony speaks to market imperialism, for which he is completely on board. But he goes a step further, eschewing the traditional Open Door policy described in the works of Walter LeFeber and William Appleman Williams (and explored in Gallagher and Robinson's "Imperialism of Free Trade") to militarize trade as now an adversarial process, having an independent political-ideological component. China and Russia are in Obama's bombsight, beyond considerations of trade, investment, and even international prestige. His Pacific-first strategy translates and transfers Dulles's Containment Policy to the rising world power, China, as meanwhile hostility toward Russia is coming increasingly into the foreground.

What, then, about the Middle East? With Israel and oil placed in the safety-deposit box of US policy, largely non-negotiable in terms of previously established practice, America, through its cultivation of allies, its interventions, its military bases, has created what amounts to a staging area, fulcrum of power, launching pad for extending actual and potential military capabilities over a vaster territorial reach than could otherwise be achieved. The region becomes a geopolitical epicenter facing outward to monitor and/or engage Russia to the north, China, to the east, etc., as described in my Comment. A further consideration: regional upheaval, it may have been feared, would lead to a power-vacuum, which, as Putin's intercession with respect to Syria, portended, in American eyes, Russia's intention to extend its influence, and perhaps even fill the gap. No power-vacuum would be allowed.

My NYT Comment on Cohen's article, same date, follows:

Excellent schematic overview of Middle East (Old/New largely the same) contradictions, except that readily resolvable when one seeks the underlying element: US geopolitical/geostrategic vision of providing the foundation for a regional power base to widen its own global sphere of influence. Beyond the obvious—protection of Israel, security of oil interests and supply—America sees the Middle East as the world's underbelly for exercising influence and control pointing north (Europe and Russia), south (sub-Saharan Africa), east (China), west (Southern Europe, Iberian Peninsula, North Africa), an arc of command critical, by definition, to global military-trade-investment hegemony, and especially important in creating the western pincer-movement on China, the eastern pressure coming from Obama's Pacific-first strategy.

Go over Mr. Cohen's dozen points, all excellent, and factor in America's self-defined interests, and the contradictions begin to unravel. When the US overthrew Mossadegh many years ago, the ball was already set in motion for moving up the court.

Finally, we see last weekend increasing concern about the performance of the American economy, not out of place in light of recent stock market declines. Paul Krugman's NYT article, "Talking Troubled Turkey," 1-31-14, emphasizes international problems, but in the broader context for discussing America's weak growth rate, he points out the excessive rate of savings in relation to an insufficient rate of investment, all nice and tidy, academically schematic—whatever it takes to look away from systemic malfunctions in capitalism itself.

Krugman is the quintessential liberal economist, one who complains loudly about gross disparities in the distribution of wealth, yet fails to provide the requisite economic and social policies to overcome them. Enlargement of the public sector, as in the entirety of pump-priming activities in the New Deal—from mobilizing artists, poets, and dramatists in WPA projects, to, yes, leaf-raking, to the construction of hydroelectric dams (all part of the concept and practice of the conservation of the national estate, which provided, quite literally, the unemployed useful projects in CCC)—remains off-limits, as a species of socialism. Also off-limits and going well beyond the New Deal, there is no recommendation for significant public ownership, tight regulation of business and banking, taxation as a weapon in the redistribution of wealth, etc. To extract substantive criticism of capitalism from Krugman would be like pulling teeth.

My NYT Comment on his article, same date, follows:

All hail the theory/doctrine “secular stagnation,” as guidepost to negotiating Sisyphean slope capitalism in general, and US capitalism in particular, must forever ascend. For Krugman/Summers bubbles are not only good, they are essential, lest the rate of savings increases and that of investment declines. What a prospect, because this is telling us capitalism requires spend, spend, spend—no matter the content or social utility of the spending.

People can starve, be homeless, etc., but what is crucial is WASTE, keep the gears in motion, and, faced with choices, America favors sinking resources into military hardware and a global troop presence, rather than public spending for job creation, infrastructure, health insurance, the social safety net—for after all, that would be socialism.

The formula for success: perpetual war. The phrase “military Keynesianism” is too glib by far, because it fails to take account of the psychopathology of global hegemony as a factor in its own right. But operationally it is a correct analysis of whatever is keeping the US economy going. Krugman closes with the admonition about “the underlying weakness of Western economies, a weakness made much worse by really, really bad policies,” but he does not go far enough. He does not tell us what they are, perhaps instinctively recognizing that to do so might call into question capitalism itself.

The American economy, and concern over its growth rate, is also treated in the NYT editorial, “The Economic Road Ahead,” 2-1-14, in which there is actually more than a glimmer of recognition that a dyspeptic capitalism may have some structural flaws. How could it be otherwise, given, beyond the savings : investment ratio, large-scale unemployment, working peoples’ lack of purchasing power, other signs of what is only hinted at, integral to the system a persistence of underconsumption rooted in the inequalities of income, wealth, and power.

As Jackie Chalmes shrewdly observed in The Times, 2-4-14, there is a world of difference , accompanied by respective legislative solutions, when the distinction is raised about addressing opportunity and inequality, the latter an unpleasant reminder of the truth that no one wants to hear, the former, a safe exhortation that does not require attacking wealth and the wealthy. Obama in his State of the Union referred far more often to opportunity than to inequality. The Times editorial recognizes underconsumption, but, like Krugman, confines its analysis within the existing structure of capitalism.

My NYT Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

“Cautious optimism” is way too optimistic. You hit the nail on the head in observing that growth may not in fact “be broadly shared,” i.e., growth per se is a misleading if not pernicious indicator, when the real problem for the economy is distribution, and for a democracy, EQUITABLE distribution. As you admit, America is a long way away from meeting that target—one that, in truth, neither party favors. Obama’s record on job creation is half-hearted, pathetic. Ditto, relatedly, any attempt to arrest the wide disparities of wealth and income in America. Instead, we have maldistribution at historic highs.

Neither party possesses the moral-political-economic imagination to entertain New Deal-type solutions to pervasive underconsumption, as meanwhile unemployment is rife, foreclosures continue, the infrastructure is rotting, and, withal, money is shoveled into defense, and that, at the expense of a vibrant social safety net, with the result of exacerbating differentials in wealth and income.

Obama is no FDR—not even a Herbert Hoover or Alf Landon, but pretty much the spokesman for corporatism now interlaced with militarism. This is hardly a path to authentic recovery, and rather, a paradigm of growth leaving the average citizen behind. Impoverishment is becoming more real each day; I now see men at street intersections begging. Foreign policy has become the Great Distraction covering over social misery at home.

FEBRUARY 14, 2014

### **Baby-Steps Toward Neo-Fascism**

What may seem like isolated signs—a drone assassination, a trade partnership, military pressure to force agreement with US policies—aren’t; they are both part of a unified framework and represent a cumulative development promoting their integration. On the former, America is so obsessed with social control and hierarchical class ordering at home, counterrevolution and market penetration abroad, that it cannot help itself—neo-fascism (I use the term to signify an emergent ideological-structural process, not yet fully realized) becomes an almost knee-jerk reaction. Advanced capitalism defines America’s societal core, out of which public policy radiates in all directions. On the latter, historically, America has followed a consistent pattern for the maintenance and protection of its political economy—an evolution of increasing wealth concentration, itself a function of greater consolidation of industry and banking, combined with a supportive climate of deregulation and public subsidy—and its political culture of the primacy of the property right, from which all other rights take their meaning (or are so interpreted). The composite picture is akin to, the US does what it has to do, as the means of ensuring its identity and inner construction. Capitalism is a jealous mistress requiring constant appeasement and devotion lest it atrophy, become senile, break down. Hence its mentality of survival, cast as ongoing rejuvenation: the need to demonize its enemies (and where there are none, to create them, as the means for unifying, on ruling-groups’ terms, a society of profound inequalities and inequities stemming from them), along with the drive for global hegemony, as confirmation of its ideology and institutional system (and incidentally, its imperative quest for profits to keep the coffers overflowing and structural dynamics operating).



This systemic integration and cumulative historical reinforcement (hegemony, market expansion, domestic ORDER–dominant themes, following different strategies to suit the requisite power available and global circumstances) have been evident since at least the Civil War. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find, once alerted to the developmental course and singular regard for property, that each and every day American capitalism exhibits the telltale signs of reproducing itself in ways large and small, tighter and tighter in the solidification of its power and its impregnation of the American polity. It is as though the result were a focus on stabilization (particularly beginning in the late 19th century amid the widespread incidence of industrial violence) rooted in a deterministic ideological mind-set.

Actually, there is nothing deterministic about it, and rather the continued ascendancy of ruling elites defines a long-term historical-structural context in which the scope for alternative patterns of development is progressively narrowed: capitalism, by force of labor suppression as well as by force of argument. I do not follow consensus-devotees in the forefront of the Great American Celebration (a sure path to academic preferment and advancement), except when consensus is recognized to be gained at what Barrington Moore and others have termed, legitimated violence. Determinism is unnecessary when the cards of power lie on one side, and diversions of war, intervention, and the constant drumbeat of patriotism are ready to hand.

To illustrate the point of the baby-steps taken in the downhill march, or, if one prefers, an historical progression, in the direction of neo-fascism, I have chosen a three-day period from this past week in which one sees the movement away from political-social democracy, with no pressures mounted in the opposite direction. In sum, a linear, non-dialectical process is at work, as if protest has been absorbed into the governing consensus, so that capitalism by necessity is more rigidly maintained than perhaps ever before, in light of the changing composition of world political-economic forces, with the result that it appears self-enclosed, giving itself license to act without restraint, taking on increasing force against all obstructions to the advancements made in the degree of the private centralization of power. Obama is the ideal comprador (a term one should savor for its exactness in describing his services to American elites, who are more rapidly coalescing into a ruling group under his watch), through extending and utilizing the National Security State (think: massive surveillance, but also his closeness to the military and intelligence communities, all wrapped in the whole cloth of counterterrorism) primarily as cover in order to inform American capitalism with greater military and economic power, the State its willing instrument and accomplice.

The interpenetration between business and government, which, according to Gabriel Kolko's *Triumph of Conservatism*, began in the TR-Wilson era, with the former's Bureau of Corporations, the latter's Federal Reserve System, both providing a shield for the protection of major corporate and banking interests, and thereby facilitating the rationalization (in the Weberian sense) of the capitalist system. Regulation from day one was transvalued as non-regulation, true through the present and no doubt into the future—not merely regulatory capture, but systematized governmental mission, in advanced capitalism, to construct a political environment, safe from attack on the Left, that promotes monopolization and the pyramiding of intersectoral consolidation (business power multiplied through trade-association activity). Decade-by-decade, different features are added (e.g., the NAM and Chamber of Commerce come into their own in the 1920s), and certainly, reliance on military power throughout the 20th century for business expansion remained ready-to-use. But now,

something is qualitatively different: there is a new relationship between the military and American capitalism. It is not simply adjunctive to American capitalism, as before, but central to the latter's very structure.

Interpenetration as the salience of power in America has, I believe, to be amended to update Kolko's brilliant formulation a half-century ago: the steadily rising importance of militarism within the business-government partnership has transformed both business and government, or, to step back and adopt the more basic description, capitalism and the State, making the former more firmly dependent on the military (not only the profitability of the defense sector in its own right, and defense as underwriting economic growth, such as it is, but as the obvious instrument securing and enforcing hegemony in all its myriad aspects), and converting the latter, government itself, into a framework for military activity, its customary functions falling by the wayside. Thus, the emendation of Kolko's formulation, in which interpenetration becomes the militarization of business and government, a three-legged partnership, the former two maintaining control of the third, but sufficiently infused by its spirit, requirements, and purposes, to signify the mobilization of power as the defining trait of capitalism in fulfilling its systemic needs. Schumpeter's bourgeoisie is out the window, as capitalism reveals its appetite for conquest abroad, exploitation at home.

In tone and policy direction, USG has become a Military State. This, in turn, has clear implications for the structural organization of capitalism. For it provides the economic foundations—the consolidation of business, industry, and banking, in large-scale units—for waging aggressive policies on the world stage. TR, his reputation as a trust-buster laughable, sought to match the economic base with military power, the former a precondition for the latter, with the result that monopolism became the sustaining force, appreciated quite early, for in essence the globalization of American capitalism. The concept is highly Germanic, a Junker-style closed system of heavy industry to be matched with the Great White Fleet (fittingly named) as its geopolitical corollary. Monopoly signified national strength, and gave reason (the export-orientation—and disposal of surplus production) to expand through overseas markets. Even without the Bolshevik Revolution, intracapitalist rivalries were reason enough for desiring a strong military—an international framework still governing, the more so as Russia and China abandon their ideological principles and pretensions. Using the renewed Cold War as a psychological crutch doesn't hurt either, in ensuring the central role of the military in American thinking and action.

This I take to be indispensable background, the corporate-militarist fusion, which has come to define the quotidian reality of our times. The enlargement of the ruling class is occurring, yet retaining cohesion in spite of growth, because business and banking leadership seek further integration with their military and defense counterparts, the latter no longer merely servants of power but (for a start) junior partners in recognition that capitalism as a system requires firming up, as rival powers herald a promising future. The US has gladly arrogated to itself the guardianship of world capitalism—that goes without saying (indeed, the standard formula ever since Wilson's Siberian Intervention). But more, brought up to date, it also arrogates to itself the status and condition, by right, of being on a permanent war footing. This is good for business, bad for the social safety net, and horrendous in its consequences for the structure of international relations.

I have selected four baby-steps, from Feb. 7-9, my vehicle, as usual, the New York Times, because, more than the WSJ, it provides a window into Establishment-thinking, more constructive than adheres in the politics of the status quo, yet, passing as the Voice of Modern Liberalism,

corporatist always, it stands in reality for the political culture of centrist antiradicalism. This is not good enough, whether our standard be social democratization of the American power structure, or the impartial reporting of the news itself, in which, despite excellent national-security and financial investigative reporting, The Times persists in granting Obama a free pass in practically everything and, in foreign affairs, identifies with US hegemonic goals and actions. Its liberal credentials and reputation superbly illuminate the eclipse of liberalism as a progressive agent of change. One could, of course, in documenting these baby-steps, choose dramatic news items—e.g., Keystone XL, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Snowden’s revelations of surveillance—but my concern is with the everyday, where, nonetheless, one sees unidirectional policies which have been insinuated into the ordinary fabric of American life and thought.

Let’s start with the constant disparagement of Russia, as in the NYT editorial, “A Spotlight on Mr. Putin’s Russia,” (Feb. 7), all the more significant because of its lessened intensity, part of the ongoing chatter, in which one realizes that for Americans the Cold War never ended. Putin is the simulacrum of Stalin, who, in turn, is that of Lenin—not in the hands of The Times, so much, as in the climate of fear and suspicion it helps to engender, out of which a generalized demonization of country, leader, political economy, then follows. Hence for those watching the Olympics, it was perfectly predictable that in describing the opening ceremonies, featuring a gala narrative of Russian historical development, NBC staff would have choice words to offer as the section dealing with the Revolution passed in review. As well, Pussy Riot, in their American visit, are treated as high-fashion freedom fighters. (Without wishing either to praise the Revolution or condemn Pussy Riot, my point simply is our adversarial obsession with Russia.)

Here The Times: “The Olympic Games ... are intended to be the fulfillment of President Vladimir Putin’s quest for prestige and power on the world stage. But the reality of Mr. Putin and the Russia he leads conflicts starkly with Olympic ideals and fundamental human rights. There is no way to ignore the dark side—the soul-crushing repression, the cruel new antigay and blasphemy laws and the corrupt legal system in which political dissidents are sentenced to lengthy terms on false charges.” Fine. I won’t dispute “the dark side,” whether or not exaggerated (for any abridgment of human rights should be opposed and resisted), but neither The Times (because not speaking out) nor America has clean hands in the matter. Prison conditions in Russia, the editorial charges, are deplorable; are they not so, here as well? The paper’s silence about everything from drone assassination to wealth-concentration to gun violence to environmental spoliation, precisely in the context of an attack on Putin and Russia, is ear-splitting.

One-sidedness: add the size of the military budget; deregulation (and the consequences of the self-induced financial crisis on the lives of working people); failure to address unemployment, foreclosures; the crisis mentality engendered through the national-security ideology and program of counterterrorism (and the list goes on indefinitely)—all of which point to the creation of a permanent war psychology, in which fears of Russia mingle with, become attached to, the posture toward international terrorism. All Putin lacks in the popular imagination is an eye-mask and sizzling bomb ready to be thrown. It is the further creation, an undifferentiated ENEMY, which calls for societal acquiescence in all things, including “austerity” and reductions in the social safety net, that gives to counterterrorism/anti-Russian thought and policy an adventitious or contrived quality. Demonization works well, provided the ground is well-tended.

This first baby-step, a reinstated Cold War, now becomes readily extended even more explicitly—given the allocation of US military forces to the region—to China, still retaining, even intensifying, the made-up case for imagining provocation or justifying confrontation. And the result is the same, a sure-fire setting for the weakening of civil liberties, the stifling of social criticism, whether of monopolization, globalization, or destruction of the environment, and the shoving through of legislation detrimental to public health and the regulation of corporate wealth and privilege. Having an enemy serves to unify the nation around its economic and political leadership. It also conduces to the uncritical acceptance of its ideological formulas of exceptionalism and divine-right hegemony in the world. Together, we see a neat psychopathological bundle of xenophobia and ethnocentrism as the underlying, or breeding, ground for ensuring the militarization of capitalism, an important factor in the ultimate formation of a fascist polity.

My NYT Comment on the editorial, “Mr. Putin’s Russia,” same date, follows:

Would that NYT would show as much indignation to US violations of human rights! As bad as Putin is reputed to be, he does not lead a campaign to ASSASSINATE putative terrorists, and is not in Obama’s ballpark on collateral damage. Nor has he launched two major interventions (Iraq, Afghanistan) or provided a worldwide paramilitary operation of CIA-JSOC forces. Nor expended as much as the US on a military budget and, especially, nuclear modernization.

Until NYT gives equal attention to USG outrages (I stress “equal,” because there should not be a double-standard, and Russia too must be put under the human-rights microscope), it loses all credibility and simply becomes a vehicle for renewing the Cold War. Freedom of the press requires honesty in all things: NYT has largely given the Obama administration a free pass, focusing on Republicans as a convenient scapegoat to explain away POTUS’s dismal record on civil liberties (Espionage Act prosecutions), detainee abuse, deregulation that winks at metabanks’ illegalities, and the continued widening of class-and-income differentials fostering the all-time high concentration of wealth. Your heart bleeds for the authoritarian-ridden Russians, not a word about unemployed Americans, the homeless from the mortgage-foreclosure fiasco, the horrendously-sized prison population. Instead, NYT uses gay rights as an entering wedge for stirring up political mischief.

Welcome to Cold War II, then perhaps you’ll be satisfied.

The second example, more indirect, concerns the effect of the Affordable Care Act on the labor market and labor productivity, in which Republicans confuse job losses with workers’ voluntarily deciding to work less (because having health coverage no longer contingent on full-time employment), as in Eric Cantor’s rush to judgment that “millions of Americans will lose their jobs and those who keep them will see their hours and wages reduced.” Prof. Krugman, exposing the untruth, comes to the rescue, “in the ever-mendacious campaign against health reform.” Krugman is correct—up to a point. As the Doyen of Liberal Economics, we must be respectful—also up to a point. The reason I include this discussion as a baby-step toward neo-fascism (and Krugman is the same day-in and day-out) is that in his NYT article, “Health, Work, Lies,” (Feb. 7), he is once more converting dross into gold and thereby discouraging the grasp of structural-ideological alternatives, here valuing ACA well beyond its merits, at the expense of critical awareness and the growth of political consciousness. Liberalism is a soporific, not simply blurring class identity or captivating

the citizenry in a party-framework predicated on false choices, but also, in mock gesture to the Left, reabsorbing radical energies and social forces into an elite-defined consensus tantamount to collective self-castration.

Demonization is alive and well as a standard defense mechanism in avoiding responsibility for the social welfare. America demonizes Russia, Krugman, mirroring the Democratic party-line, demonizes the Republicans, all to the same effect—as an excuse for NOT fighting the people’s battles, here health care, but also much more, from failure to oppose the structural dynamics of wealth-concentration, including the military-drained welfare sector and business-banking deregulation, to the wholesale slaughter of civil liberties, itself, in part, a reflection of the militaristic cultural atmosphere. Reading Krugman, one would think economic phenomena exist in a total vacuum, no need therefore to make reference to the surrounding world of war, class, power, etc. Converting dross to gold (Obamacare) is not a harmless enterprise; it shrinks the nation’s ideological vision, narrows the parameters of social change, delivers the people into the hands of the Corporate State in transformation into the National-Security State. The best he can say in defense of ACA is, “Remember, the campaign against health reform has, at every stage, grabbed hold of any and every argument it could find against insuring the uninsured, with truth and logic never entering the matter.” Nor does a stand-up-and-fight promotion of single-payer or the public option ever enter the matter. Liberalism helps to shift the goal posts further to the Right, its contribution to neo-fascism being the operant mechanism for the pacification of the people.

My NYT Comment on the article, “Health, Work, Lies,” same date, follows:

As Krugman says, “Think about it.” Why give space to Eric Cantor’s distortions when the real issue remains, WHY ACA, a boon to gluttonous health insurers, when Obama could have fought for single payer, and, stirring up enough indignation, conceded, if necessary, and then pushed for the public option? Krugman covers himself with the aside, “flawed and incomplete though it is,” when it is there that he should dig in, analyze, expose. No, instead Obama emerges in all sweetness and light.

ACA is merely a continuation of Rubin-Summers deregulation, the enforced capitulation of government whenever the public interest is to be addressed. Economists almost to a person accommodate themselves to wealth and reject solutions, even still under capitalism (viz. New Deal and FDR), that interfere with immense profit-taking. Krugman advocates essentially for trickle-down while waving a liberal banner. In fact modern liberalism is now about where Republicans were in the 1930s.

Since the focus here is on labor and the labor market, why not a systematic analysis of wage stagnation and the hostile climate for union organization? That surely bears on health insurance, in the context—largely ignored—of the overall assault on the social safety net, as much Democrats’ doing as their rivals’ obstruction. This week the Senate failed to extend unemployment benefits—factor that into the discussion. Cantor is not worth a single line; Krugman, enlarge your social vision!

A third baby-step in the downhill march, economic chicanery in the service of mega-wealth acquisition, can be seen from the evidence in James B. Stewart’s excellent article in The Times (still Feb. 7), “Past Fictions, a Lack of Trust and No Deal in SAC Case.” SAC refers to one of our favorite high-flyers in the financial universe, Steven A. Cohen, and his SAC Capital Advisors, a

firm much in the news because of alleged insider-trading. So, what else is new? The financial sector is corruption brought to a standard of perfection not seen since the late 1920s, and its relevance to neo-fascism consists, among other things, in its contribution to the systemic breakdown of capitalism, a setting out of which cynicism reigns as people become demoralized and look for strong leadership and extreme solutions—or simply turn ugly and look instead for scapegoats.

Cohen to this day has avoided prosecution, here the case of his last-minute reversal of “the firm’s position on two drug companies,” making a bet “that netted the firm \$275 million.” Perhaps chicken-feed, not worth pursuing—except for the glimpse it affords into capitalism’s workings on the everyday level, a political economy not known for its concern for human betterment. But attention is not on him, and rather, on one of his former traders, Mathew Martoma, whom prosecutors want to reveal details of his conversation with Cohen about the reversal of position. Martoma won’t talk, and he faces a lengthy sentence for insider trading. Martoma is my current nominee for prized jewel in the crown of American capitalism, and it is only fitting that Cohen, perhaps running true to form, should hire him as a trader.

Rather than star-witness against Cohen, he is that for the demiurgical force driving the system forward, the appetitive nature of capitalism devouring its own. Martoma was expelled from Harvard Law School (HLS) for “alter[ing] his transcript to improve his grades, and had used the fabrication to seek prestigious judicial clerkships.” That is only the beginning. Called before the school’s administrative board, he told a succession of lies so intricately woven (he wanted to please his parents with higher grades, the true transcript was stored in a cabinet, the fake one on his desk, sent out by mistake, his denial that he wanted a clerkship, so the transcript was a joke, etc. etc.) as to be worthy of admiration—except that HLS wasn’t buying. Yet, what does rascality have to do with neo-fascism? Martoma, our poster boy, is so beautifully emblematic of the deterioration of society’s moral fabric in its materialization of human striving and aspiration as to leave the psyche a seeming black hole to be filled with ideological garbage reinforcing an authoritarian-prone social order.

My NYT Comment on the Stewart article, same date, follows:

Kudos to Mr. Stewart, proving nonfiction trumps fiction, for however skilled the novelist, he/she would be no match for Martoma’s larger-than-life doings. I especially liked the ending, a co-founder of HLS’s Society of Law and Ethics. Perhaps now Martoma could auction off the screen rights, a sure box-office winner.

Seriously, Martoma may regrettably serve as a microcosm of the present generation’s financial integrity, the incentive system of America’s pecuniary culture, the moral void characterizing prevailing social relations, from government on down (as in massive surveillance and the contempt shown for traditional standards of civil liberties and privacy). Martoma may well replace the Ugly American of fiction with the Quintessential American of fact. In all of this, I am proud of HLS for exposing the fraud, as a Harvard Ph.D. in a wholly different area who has misgivings about the University today compared with a half-century ago.

When will self-invention (worthy of a Scott Fitzgerald character) cease being rewarded? Stewart’s account is must reading in this wealth-crazed society, with its colossal appetite for amoral, cynical advancement. Not only Wall Street but, of course, Washington top-to-

bottom. It would be fitting if he receives a gentle wrist-slap, so complicit is the law and the regulatory system in the corruption of the American political economy.

Finally, a fourth step, two day later, The Times editorial, “The Case for a Higher Minimum Wage,” (Feb. 9), illustrates the well-meaning attempt—“increasing the minimum wage is vital to the economic security of tens of millions of Americans, and would be good for the weak economy”—to confront the problem of underconsumption (not mentioned directly because it would lead to a fundamental critique of capitalism), yet holding all other factors cemented in place. The minimum-wage issue is divorced from the systemic, inordinately weak distribution of wealth, power, and income. Again, “congressional Republicans” are demonized, when in reality neither major party has tackled wealth-concentration and the structure of power supporting it. The editorial seeks advantage from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the first minimum-wage legislation, to argue that a basic division between the parties exists (in the present) “over government’s role in the economy, over raw versus regulated capitalism, over corporate power versus public needs,” coasting on the reputation of the New Deal to hide the record of current Democrats, Obama on down. Were it only so, instead of notorious deregulation of capitalism, perversion of government into a systemic shell for unleashing military power, and driving the very concept of “public needs” six feet under.

On the surface, no sight of neo-fascism here. Yet, like single-factor analysis in general, the long-term damage is done: providing a false sense of security, once the problem at hand is resolved, to deflect social change from much-needed societal reconstruction. Liberalism, as the absorber of discontents, becomes a pushover, not unlike Weimar, in failing to meet the challenge (or even signify it) of what in Germany was called, “the marriage of iron and rye,” and in America, should be called, the symbiosis (verging on total integration) of business, industry, finance, and the military—a neatly-wrapped package resting on a social base of political-ideological habituation to compromise, thence obedience.

My NYT Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

\$10.10 is more liberal pizzazz, catchy, seemingly small d democratic, yet accomplishing nothing for the reformation of the American social structure, itself the widest class-differential in wealth, income, and power in US history. In sum, a bandaid, so that its being unacceptable to some signifies how morally bankrupt, cynical, apathetic the opponents within an essentially retrograde total party system. This is bipartisan continuity on the road to semifascism. Why? Because even under strict capitalist guidelines (never mind socialism), America lacks the will, and is ideologically too far gone, to consider PUBLIC solutions to poverty, underconsumption, pitiable wages.

The New Deal and FDR enacted Fair Labor Standards in '38 in the context of sweeping activity from the now-forgotten alphabets beginning five years earlier! WPA, CCC, PWA, etc. not only put people to work, thereby preserving their skills and their human dignity, but addressed major problems, achieving dam construction, reforestation, problems once again (witness crumbling infrastructure) with us, not because of natural deterioration, but rather massive defense spending, interventions, a reigning spirit of militarism—all deeply eroding the social safety net.

Starting with \$10.10 is like putting rouge on an empty corpse. Wealth still goes to the top. Nothing is changed in the proportionate distribution of wealth and power. The righteous, i.e., NYT, have a feel-good moment, as the status quo only tightens.

FEBRUARY 18, 2014

### **A Quiet Weekend of Authoritarianism**

America tilts ever-Rightward, the quotidian political reality, no breaks or surprises. My journal entries are New York Times Comments, observations (jumping-off places for triggering wider discussion) which punctuate and record the concreteness of systemic descent, the non-sensational preferred as indicators of societal direction. Thus, on the 14th, we find Comcast attempting the takeover of Time Warner Cable, seemingly the nitty-gritty suited to the financial page when actually, beyond signifying trends toward further economic concentration per se (the foundation of national power in all its forms), substantially magnifies the social-control dimensions of the business system, itself allied to the National Security State, both of which are essential to the advanced stage of capitalism. Size alone seems the focus of attention, when, increasingly, American ideology is becoming more rigid, and American thought more constrained and narrow, readily subject to external manipulation and the management of news content.

Critical thinking and awareness recede, fed on a steady diet of intellectual pap so necessary to sustaining global intervention, market-and-investment penetration, a dedication to permanent war, in the context of equally permanent counterrevolution. Here Comcast may not be the enemy at the gates, merely the messenger of an unrestrained capitalist structural process for ensuring acquiescence in all things having corporate profit as societal priority number one. In addition, cable television as a political sedative isn't to be taken lightly. The Great Homogenizer of ideas, the diversion from meaningless striving, it supports a culture which is bereft of moral-social obligation and enforces a collective self-castration, especially of and by working people, ensuring an intact class system.

Throughout the negotiations, we see, as usual, a feckless FCC, illustrating not only deregulation at the core of government policy-making, but also the shrinkage of the sources of dissemination, and thereby strengthening the hold of business on the American mind. Antitrust is deader than the dodo. The Obama administration likes it that way, each of the cabinet departments fairly tripping over themselves in conferring favors on the Vested Interests. Think, for example, Interior granting oil leases on public lands, State, running interference for Trans-Canada on the Keystone XL project, and of course DOD for enriching defense contractors at every turn. To forbid the Comcast takeover would be like burning the American Flag. Next to war, monopolization is the highest Good. My NYT Comment on the editorial, "If a Cable Grant Becomes Bigger," also the 14th, follows:

The Comcast acquisition of Time Warner Cable fits perfectly the US pattern of increasing monopolization wherever one turns, regulation per se a farce and in this case doubly so, given how close Cohen and Roberts are to the Obama administration. The revolving door, clearly operant in the careers of the FCC "regulators," negates regulation. FCC is par for the course, intended to protect consolidation from public/consumer opposition, which itself is becoming nonexistent. We sat on our hands when Clinton-Rubin-Summers savaged Glass-



Steagall, but even there one could trace back nearly a century wherein antitrust was dead in all but rhetoric.

Americans are habituated to acquiesce in all m & a activities, the bigger the better, and the same holds for government favoritism to major vested interests, as in the bank bailouts; so here again the charade, as the deal works to completion. Roberts and his golfing partner Obama, Cohen and his visits to the White House—all chummy, as the wheels within wheels grind on, to the detriment, even within capitalism, of textbook competition and the merit of the product. Comcast happens to be in the limelight, but in reality it represents the entire business system, with other firms in other sectors waiting in the wings to foster the process of wealth concentration and its corollary, the widening class-differentiation in the social structure of wealth, income, and power.

Economic democracy, anyone?

Parallel to the deregulation and monopolization of business, we have a disparagement and degradation of labor. Paul Krugman, “Inequality, Dignity and Freedom,” (Feb. 14), ostensibly rushing to the support of labor in the face of Republican charges (esp. Cantor, Ryan) that workers will work fewer hours or just loaf under the Affordable Care Act, assured of health benefits for less than full-time employment, makes matters worse by accepting the status quo of existing gross income disparities when defending the Act and the American worker. With friends like Krugman, working people do not need enemies! Paul Ryan charges that not to work full-time undermines the dignity of labor; Krugman counters that the dignity of labor can best be served with the social safety net, but then freezes it within a framework which makes a mockery of working people’s dignity itself through a highly unequal structure of power which includes wealth-concentration as perhaps greater than in any period of US history, along with a hostile climate for labor organization and a safety net ever diminishing in effectiveness, as in the case of ACA, which is a disgrace to comprehensive health care).

Labor dignity stands in contradiction to the existing structure of wealth and power; because Republicans are so punitive does not excuse Democrats from pursuing societal democratization, an impossible goal when the party leadership helps to emasculate the safety net through delivering on the huge budgetary allocation to the military. Krugman sees only Republican obstructionism, never Democratic affinity for the mammoth defense budget, deregulation, intervention, nuclear modernization, acceptance of NSA, CIA, and JSOC missions which each in turn signifies militarism trumping democracy—more than affinity a heart-and-soul pressing for the National Security State that solidifies class-differences and denies the dignity of labor and of the laborer, both treated as commodities directly or indirectly contributing to the war machine. My NYT Comment on Krugman’s article, same date, follows:

A true liberal analysis, societal myopia at its best. Krugman queries: “So what would give working Americans more dignity in their lives, despite huge income disparities?” No matter what entitlements are forthcoming, “huge income disparities” wholly invalidate democracy. Krugman keeps the fundamental framework of class-differentiation in wealth, income, and power INTACT, and then, within that framework, introduces the dignity of labor. Wealth consolidation at the top, but be nice to working Americans, unlike Cantor, Ryan, and those nasty Republicans.

In truth, Obama, a Democrat, is presiding over the largest wealth inequality in American history, and as for Krugman's defense of ACA, how even begin to square it with the dignity of labor? Democrats share equal responsibility with Republicans in creating a society where "dignity of labor" is a public-relations obfuscation for perpetuating hardship, unemployment, foreclosure, even signs of widespread homelessness—as meanwhile the wealth-concentration process continues unabated (and with Obama's approval).

Then, too, we see surveillance, interconnected with monopolization and the disparagement of labor, not simply because of the simultaneous occurrence of all three, but because America's ruling groups, which now includes a significant military presence in their composition and sense of purpose, is tightening the reins in the conservation of their power. Surveillance to this extent has not been seen before in America and implies the fear of losing political-economic-social-ideological ground within the polity, as well as the possible decline of capitalism as a world system and US dominance within and the power to define what remains. Surveillance smacks of fascism, however you cut it, but also the psychopathology of desperation in holding back social forces of change.

One facet of surveillance is its global reach, in particular the eavesdropping on Merkel of Germany has brought American-German relations to a new postwar low. Roger Cohen's article in *The Times*, "An Ally Offended," Feb. 14th, describes their deterioration, floundering on the rock of mistrust in light of the US assault on the privacy right, which, for Merkel, raises still larger questions about America's hegemonic claims. In sum, this practice exposes the US's drive toward global stabilization to its own advantage and on its own terms. Germany is not playing ball, sending Obama into controlled anger because he cannot have his way. Merkel's denial of his appearance at the Brandenburg Gate (calling the speech an act of hubris) epitomizes the wakening of those pushed around by American military and trade policy. My NYT Comment on Cohen's article, same date, follows:

When Merkel can say she misses George W., you know the current situation is bad. Obama is a disaster for international comity, more interventionist, destabilizing, heavy-handed than all of his predecessors (including Reagan) in the postwar world. Surveillance, stupid as well as unconscionable. Pacific-first, as well as acrimony with Putin and Russia, suggests the advent of a New Cold War, this time enlarged to include China as well as Russia. And Nuland's use of the "f" word is so typical of US foreign policy, ranging over the world with drone assassinations, CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations, and now, the falling out with Karzai. I wish the Nobel Committee would rescind the Peace Prize, or at least apologize to the world for its flagrant error.

Unlike much of EU policy-making, Germany is showing the courage to question US policies, including that of tilting Ukraine to Europe. The word "hubristic" was mentioned; actually, harsher terms are in order, beginning with ego-maniacal, characterizing both Obama and America's strident concept and application of Exceptionalism. Merkel is doing what Hollande should be doing, standing up to a bully.

And two days later, Feb. 16th, we learn, based on Snowden's revelations, that NSA's foreign spying is also a cover for economic espionage, counterterrorism a front for advancing the interests of US capitalism—here collaborating with its Australian counterpart on surveillance of Indonesian economic competition. How low can NSA stoop, dragging patriotism into the mud of market

activities, in this case, the export of clove cigarettes and shrimp to our shores! This is surely opera bouffe, were it not so serious in showing the lengths to which USG will go in protecting business and the rank opportunism of NSA, enlisting other intelligence agencies in the service of capitalist profits. James Risen and Laura Poitras broke the story in their Times article, “Spying by Ally of N.S.A. Entangled a U.S. Law Firm,” in which a prestigious law firm representing Indonesian interests finds that its lawyer-client privileged communications were blasted open—perhaps finally alerting the legal community that it too can be the victim of the abrogation of civil liberties.

The Australian Signals Directorate initiated the spying on trade disputes involving these products, which meant monitoring the conversations at Mayer Brown as well as the Indonesian government, and sharing fully the information gathered with NSA, whose Office of the General Counsel gave the arrangement his blessings. Any formal prohibition about spying on Americans is conveniently nullified by having partners do the surveillance—part of the rampant cynicism informing these activities. Even the sacred character of business is no longer sacred, surveillance becoming a law unto itself. My NYT Comment on the Risen-Poitras article, same date, follows:

Clove cigarettes and shrimp, terrorist monsters threatening to destroy the American Way of Life! In sum, NSA hiding behind the skirts of Counterterrorism is up to its pelvis in economic espionage. Despicable, and worse, an obvious negation of a democratic society. CIA is bad enough, but USG under Obama is becoming a Rogue State, capable of tearing apart the fabric of international relations. Peace Prize, HA. On all fronts the US is veering sharply to the Right, but NSA truly takes the cake, a categorical despoiler of civil liberties.

To what end? Can America afford to show its face in the world when a govt. agency verges toward fascism? Little things are revealing, here the smashing of lawyer-client privileged communication. That violation is merely the frosting on the cake of massive surveillance here and abroad.

NSA embodies precisely the cynicism and disrespect for the law that one ALSO finds in POTUS’s personal authorization of targeted assassination: Tuesday night hit-list murder, off the Situation Room.

This need not be, indeed, is not, a radical issue. Within capitalism, we see the US refusing to play by the rules of the game. We frown on insider trading, this surveillance of trade and business activities is worse still.

Instead of pleading with Obama to stop NSA practices, it is time to say, the emperor wears no clothes, is himself hand-and-glove sharing in the illegalities and the despicement of the law. Nixon looks like Pope Francis compared with him.

Finally, on the 16th, we see the attempt to rehabilitate the historical reputation of Lyndon Baines Johnson, which means, ignore, trivialize, or outright deny the existence of the Vietnam War and his role in the events. This is myth-making at its crudest, and suggests a society that cannot face the truth about itself. American cruelty was perhaps never greater, nor its whitewash more deliberate and complete. Yet festivities in Austin are cranking up for a whopping fiftieth anniversary celebration, in microcosm, a paean to American Exceptionalism in its splendid military glory. LBJ on Mt. Rushmore, if only there were more room. The argument that he was in a state of anguish and could not end the conflict does not add up. Programs of the Great Society will be trotted out to erase

the memory of Vietnam (just as Bush 2 and Obama will benefit from the same memory lapse when it comes to Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as global-wide counterrevolutionary adventures), so great the powers of denial in a society geared to the doctrine and practice of permanent war. We want our heroes larger than life, even when—or perhaps especially when—they snuff out the life of others. My NYT Comment on Adam Nagourney’s flattering article on LBJ, “Rescuing a Vietnam Casualty: Johnson’s Legacy,” same date, follows:

Reconsideration? Selective interpretation is the work of apologists—historical reality cannot be compartmentalized. Vietnam vitiates the whole record and must not be excused. LBJ knowingly presided over a scorched-earth policy, villages decimated, children napalmed; worse, he used the conflict to envelop his presidency in super-patriotism, so that the domestic legislation could go through. Murder afield, reform at home. What does this say about the quality of the reform in the first place?

I was standing on the steps of Brown’s Church in Selma when the Civil Rights Act was passed. The week before the celebrity march; Jim Reeb murdered on the streets of Selma. News of the Act, among the civil-rights activists, was greeted in silence and jeering—they knew their man. How have confidence in one who presided over heinous war crimes? War liberals, JFK and LBJ alike, criss-crossed the amoral political landscape, cynically knowing that what they allegedly gained at home was directly on the backs of those they destroyed abroad, a nation’s egocentric mind-set that puts Exceptionalism in its proper light: the dynamic interconnection of murder abroad, reform at home.

On with the rehabilitation of historical reputation. Instead of “All the Way,” we should have a revival of “McBird,” although that, too, would be too generous—the domestic record is tarnished, and because of its poor start has little sustained vitality today. Not Medicare for all, just ACA and Big Pharma.

FEBRUARY 21, 2014

### **Maintaining the American Underclass**

American history has been the history of inequality, initially racial in character, and with that irreducible flooring, and as industrialization took hold, then economic—a class-structured society with little impetus, save on the ideological level, to democratization. The idea of a minimum wage did not break surface as legislation until well into the New Deal, and even then, conspicuous for its omissions and lack of application. The cheapening of labor has been the foundation of American progress, both in industry and agriculture, with the tenant and the sharecropper the rural equivalent of the factory laborer, both native and immigrant. From slave to wage-slave marks a natural progression, when the society’s philosophic core is the property right, and more specifically, property over humans to property over their labor power. This hierarchical arrangement of structure and values is not God-given, but presupposes domination to make it happen and continue to operate smoothly.

Flash-forward to the present. We have discussion in Congress about raising the minimum wage to \$10.10, such a munificent sum (!) when considering, for example, that the National Football League’s Commissioner took home some \$42M and counting last year alone—and that, chump-

change to the leading hedge-fund managers. The obvious point: America has a screwed-up, inhumane system of priorities, so much so that it tellingly reveals everything about US policy-making, from the militarized insistence on global hegemony, market-penetration, and targeted assassination, all of which depend on the ethnocentric impersonalization of the Other as an object of disdain, to the domestic promotion of anomie, up through the depersonalization of the self, as the necessary way of keeping the System going.

\$10.10 has a magical ring, solicitous, good-hearted POTUS, and a caring party in support, as meanwhile, the entire structure of wealth-concentration and business/banking power remains untouched, in fact, is greased to produce more disproportionate wealth and power, a raise in the minimum wage, when not resisted, likened to tossing a well-gnawed bone to a dog. I used the term “repression” above advisedly, because physical force—quite standard in the history of strikes, lockouts, Pinkertons, state and national militias, throughout American history, even antedating the Civil War—though an obvious characteristic, does not begin to exhaust its meaning. Think also: legitimated repression, in terms of hemming in the entirety of working people from meaningful life-aspirations, accomplished through fiscal and monetary policies affecting the business cycle; labor legislation; the cultural barrage, or better, onslaught, dictating psychological themes of unworthiness, self-debasement, gratitude to those going all the way up in the corporate and business world; not least, among other cultural cues in a solidified ideological universe, the unconscious genuflection to overwhelming military power, by which to identify with, yet also tacitly fear in recognition of the force society holds over its populace.

\$10.10 is a way out of not confronting reality, even should it come about overnight. Workers, of course, remain workers, perhaps even further psychologically captive to the System whose wealth they create. Worker-centric industrial control is a nonstarter; public ownership equally remote, even perhaps from radical discourse. Raising the minimum wage is a species of enlightened antiradicalism, which makes of socialism the devils-brew practically akin to economic terrorism. Yet “enlightened” is not exactly the stuff of America’s ruling groups, and legitimated repression is hard to dislodge from business thinking (also shared by government). This is not to say that raising the minimum should be fought, as though a Leninist-immiserization process will lead to revolutionary activity; for whole blocs of the society now face the chilling prospect of going under, literally, at or near the stage of destitution, to which upper groups are largely blind. But, at the very least, such a raise should not be allowed to obfuscate and sidetrack discussion and action on job creation, foreclosure relief, an expanded social safety net that includes bona fide health insurance, and most important, genuine structural democratization which addresses everything from wealth-concentration and business regulation to an overweening, all-consuming military sector draining the lifeblood from American society.

My New York Times Comment to its editorial “The Clear Benefits of a Higher Wage,” (Feb. 20), follows:

It is heartbreaking to see attention focused on raising the minimum wage when a) resistance to it is puerile, almost sadistic, considering the nation’s wealth and reputation as a supposed democracy, and b) in the larger picture, class differentiation has proceeded to the point of being the widest disparities in wealth, income, and power in American history.

We seem bent on wanting to squeeze the poor, pressing them down still further, not only for the profit therein, but also as creating some psychological distance between them and the very wealthy, giving the latter greater self-justification and satisfaction. Consciously willing the degradation of labor speaks ill of a society's commitment to simple fairness, let alone social justice. The \$10.10 battle—even then not to be realized until 2016—reveals a society devoid of moral scruples and sliding precariously toward a stage of neo-fascism.

Its equivalent in foreign policy is POTUS-authorized targeted assassination; in both cases, the spirit of rule-of-law is abandoned, displaced by the arrogance of power—in one case, government, in the other, corporate America. Indeed, the two become indistinguishable.

Here again NYT can only blame Republicans. Why are not Democrats fighting harder for an increase in the minimum wage? And, again the larger picture, why are not Democrats opposing vast wealth-inequality, instead having destroyed Glass-Steagall and guided by the Rubin-Summers trickle-downers? Bipartisan consensus.

FEBRUARY 27, 2014

### **Hegemonic Glory of US Foreign Policy**

This was an interesting week. America seeks the rearrangement of European relations through Obama's intervention-from-afar in Ukraine, one further notch in revivifying the Cold War in spirit and action; Hagel announces a Pentagon budget, paraded as the reduction of forces, which implements a global strategy of counterrevolution through more precise destructive power; and Obama shifts the onus onto Karzai for jeopardizing a bilateral security arrangement (B.S.A.) on which the US counts for maintaining its influence and power in Asia. Peace is war, under the smiley face of liberalism. The foregoing aspects of American foreign policy, each not momentous in itself, part of everyday life in the National Security State, nevertheless define an integrated pattern of activity geared to the doctrine of permanent war.

Forget the Republicans, convenient whipping boys for Obama and the Democrats' excesses of militarism in fashioning a long-term capitalistic world order based on American leadership and guidance—the way we were, and are loathe to abandon! The Ukraine has proven a markedly opportune moment to take off the wraps and underscore what should in any case have been confirmed well before the presumed thaw in Cold War relations, namely, America must tenaciously cling to a posture of hostility to Russia, as confirmation of its own moral virtue, the galaxy of interventions notwithstanding (economic-political as well as military in character). Russia, the Evil Empire, justifies (first, validates America's goodness) the most ambitious rearmament in world history, itself the forward edge and ratifying condition for internal structuring of classes—disguised by a psychopathology of consumerism—which is highly unequal in the distribution of wealth, income, and power, approaching the definition of a CASTE rather than class society.

We love our enemies—they're indispensable—for what their conjuring up affords our upper groups the formal (massive surveillance) and informal (the political culture of patriotism daily reinforced through government, sport, the media, etc.) social control over the remainder of society permitted them to do under this regimen of wealth and power. Without Russia, and NOW China, how possibly justify global hegemony, or, their existence (as we have portrayed them) habituating

us to a condition of fear, the campaign of counterterrorism under whose rug we sweep every kind of abuse, the quiescence needed to erode the social safety net, retard or eliminate a comprehensive welfare framework from job creation to meaningful health insurance, and reaching moral nadir, POTUS authorizing targeted assassination. A world without Russia and China might, Heaven forbid (!), make us look more closely at ourselves and begin to address our social needs.

The Ukraine, beyond its market-penetration value, and its equally important natural resources, is in fact the fixed ground or perhaps staging area for America's waging a, for now, proxy ideological-political war with Russia, the Cold War carried on by other means, and, the way of stirring up suspicions and conflict, preventing a genuine rapprochement between Germany and Russia, possibly joined by France and other EU nations (which is why Merkel is anxious to give Putin assurances that Germany is not behind moves to attract Ukraine into the EU). Much is at stake for US foreign policy here—more than bloodying the nose of Putin or removing a defensive buffer zone from safeguarding Russia, and even more than the opening of new US investment opportunities (an obsession with Obama, witness the Trans-Pacific Partnership); for such rapprochement might strike a mortal blow at NATO, destroying its original reason for being—long since expanded to the role of sharing troops and resources in American interventions on a global basis.

Opulence, corruption (Yanuckovich) vs. Right Sector, Svoboda fascist groups (encompassing much of the western portion of the Ukraine) is hardly an appetizing choice, yet of the two, the Obama administration in behind-the-scenes intervention and strong diplomatic pressure on Russia clearly favors the latter, as the designated warrior (as in Cold War warrior, using “humanitarian intervention” as her policy schtick) Susan Rice made clear at the beginning of the week. In hindsight, her television interview inaugurated a foreign-policy offensive, followed up by Hagel's announcement—wholly misinterpreted by the media and *The Times*—of a muscle-toned military capable of more lethal yet flexible striking power, ideal for redefining the Cold War agenda to embrace the Obama “pivot” to the Pacific directed against China while counting on paramilitary operations (oh, and even, explicitly, cyberwarfare) to keep tabs on the rest of the world, Iran and Venezuela being obvious targets.

Finally this week, also seemingly orchestrated to convey the idea and image of global power, the signal to Karzai, sign on the dotted line a one-sided B.S.A., or else—the or else, a threatened withdrawal of troops that had no right to be there in the first place. Somehow, Obama is pictured as a giant in defense of Western Civilization, Karzai, the superannuated gatekeeper preventing America from completing its mission of bringing freedom to the Afghan people. I cannot say I like or respect Karzai, but, standing up to Obama is surely his finest hour. He has seen enough barbarism, torture, promiscuous slaughter of the innocents finally to stand up for his people.

My New York Times Comments concern the following: 1) Steven Lee Myers, “Deeply Bound to Ukraine, Putin Watches and Waits,” (Feb. 24); 2) editorial, “Ukraine's Uncertain Future,” (Feb. 25); 3) editorial, “A Military Budget to Fit the Times,” (Feb. 26; and 4) Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, “Trust Eroded, Obama Looks Beyond Karzai,” (Feb. 26). In my view, these topics define an interrelated policy context:

## I

An informed analysis, very helpful. For some time it has been apparent that US policy is warming up for a New Cold War (if in fact the original had ever subsided), here fishing in Ukraine's troubled waters and subtly engaged in demonizing Putin. Obama surrounds himself with hawks running true to form, as in Ms. Rice's case, or Amb. Power—and a National-Security establishment itching for confrontation, not only Russia, but, with Pacific-first, China. In fact, one reason for the present Ukrainian policy is the US conceives Russia and China as interrelated threats, and carries out its position accordingly.

Ukrainian movement toward the EU may prove less decisive than its own nationalistic impetus, which barely conceals darker currents, esp. anti-Semitism. As usual, the US plays ball with any and all who constitute potential allies in its geostrategic paradigm—Ukraine, a choice plum. We can look forward now to more international tension as previewed, before Ukraine, in Putin's warning about bombing Syria. Obama is a braggart of the first water, and any chance to ingratiate himself further with the military and intelligence communities, as here in facing off with Putin, will be most welcome in the White House.

The doctrine of permanent war—implied by and embodied in targeted assassination—is alive and well, and forms the background to current policy.

## II

The editorial resonates with US efforts to rekindle the Cold War. Ukrainian nationalism is made light of, and Putin is here demonized (“perhaps acquired in the K.G.B.”), quite lacking in subtlety. With the IMF, like a vulture poised to strike, it is obvious that the “West” is engaged in expanding the range of privatization and the fulfillment of an US geopolitical strategy intended to contain both Russia and China (the notorious “pivot”) as a means of affirming America's vision of global hegemony.

The timing is interesting. Sec. Hagel's plans for troop reductions are coupled with a still larger military budget. Flexibility, greater lethality, a more aggressive posture confirming what is now ingrained militarism, the US drawing the EU further within its orbit as part of the picture. The Ukraine becomes a convenient test case of American influence and power, those named in the editorial making no secret of the confrontational stance toward Russia.

I would like to see cooler heads prevail; the problem is, there are none. The half-trillion military budget complements, and causes, serious cuts in the social safety net. Domestic America is sacrificed to the quixotic demands for political-economic-ideological dominion, and, the grace note to this, a program of massive surveillance the likes of which has never been seen before in America.

We preach respect for civil liberties in the Ukraine and violate it unmercifully at home.

## III

The Times is all over the place in its confusion. Scaling down military forces (by 2019!) is NOT a sign of reduction of anything. By your own figures “defense” appropriations will actually increase under the new dispensation. The phrase “weapons modernization,” innocently used in the editorial, says much for what you term “reshaping the military,”



Hagel taking directly out of Robert McNamara's playbook in the Vietnam Era: more bang for the buck.

The streamlining of death, the sophisticated Strangelovean mindset, in which scratch Putin and you find Stalin, scratch Xi and you find Mao—in sum, renewal of the Cold War in high gear. And The Times falls for the so-called reduction of defense spending: a) not a reduction, and b) more aggressively war-prone under Obama than his predecessors, going all the way back to 1950. Sophisticated? Yes, “especially given Mr. Hagel's proposed INCREASE in investment in special operations, cyberwarfare and rebalancing the American presence in Asia.”

That is why I say “confused,” for by your own admission—to which you are blind—the US is altering geopolitical strategy, every bit as venomous and effective for securing and maintaining global hegemony. And combine this with tried-and-true targeted assassination, and, inseparable from the entire military posture, massive surveillance of the American people, and one has a recipe for nascent fascism—under the banner of Obama-style liberalism.

Analyze Hagel's budget better, before cheering.

#### IV

The Times' reporters, whom I otherwise respect, present here a morality play, all black-and-white, without once explaining the provisions of the B.S.A., how it has been abused in the past both in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Karzai's specific objections to its provisions.

We are entitled to more clarification. But beyond that, The Times uncritically accepts America's presence in that country in the first place. Is the actual purpose, counterterrorism? Or from its inception, has the purpose of this massive intervention been to counter Russian influence in the region? (The parallel comes to mind of dropping the Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not to end World War II, but to warn and prevent Soviet influence in Manchuria and the region.)

Obama's Pacific-first strategy, with its MILITARY attempt to isolate and contain China, is inseparable from maintaining US ongoing presence in Afghanistan and, hence, creating a larger sphere of influence in South and Central Asia. Originally we backed the Taliban, armed them to the hilt, against Russia, arms then turned against us! Hegemony invites all kinds of cruel and contradictory results.

The one-sided B.S.A., akin to US informal dominance in, and freedom to commit crimes in, the country, is not to be admired. Obama creates a vortex sucking in NATO, with obvious global repercussions, including US policy concerning Ukraine. Hagel's defense proposals nicely complement this globalization of American power.

FEBRUARY 28, 2014

## **Keynes in Handcuffs**

I am not an expert on Keynes, nor even—thank God—an economist (!), but the malarkey tossed around about how the Obama stimulus prevented another Great Depression and is responsible for the present prosperity we now allegedly enjoy (if only those churlish Republicans would stop complaining, and trying to sully St. Barack's image), is one more sign of the political-economic-moral bankruptcy of liberalism as the guardian of societal welfare. First, two points: Both parties are contemptible in their shoring up an hierarchical order of widening class-differentiation in all decisive areas, including income, wealth, and power, via bipartisan consensus on deregulation, war, taxation, humongous military budgets, hegemony in all things pertinent to the global structure, and not least, the assault on civil liberties (surveillance on a massive scale) self-checking the individual's critical thinking and expression of dissent.

In this climate, it would be impossible to expect economic policy to be other than invidiously charged, to the detriment of working people. Second, the stimulus is wrongheaded, not because, as Paul Krugman and *The Times* suggest, it did not go quite far enough (more spending, more prosperity), but because its whole purpose and orientation focused on vitalizing a status quo—the financialization and militarization of capitalism—at a still higher level, perpetuating the chicanery, abuses, and inhumanness characterizing the System in its advanced stages and responsible for the financial crisis in the first place.

The much-vaunted stimulus leaves everything otherwise intact, at best, juicing the trickle-down theory and framework of wealth distribution, structural organization, government-business interpenetration, and the political culture of militarism-corporatism trumping any and all ideas of democracy, economic or social in inspiration. Whether this falsifies Keynes (the current model, “military Keynesianism,” which even liberals applaud, i.e., the equation of defense spending and economic growth, together somehow constituting the welfare dimension of capitalism) I cannot say, because Keynes possibly left himself open to public spending per se as the basis for saving capitalism.

If so, then—anything goes—capitalism is not worth saving, because the military sector has proven inexhaustible and interventions promoting regime change, now standard practice, opens vistas of simultaneous confrontation with China and Russia, so that measuring rate of growth becomes identical to the nation's powers of destructiveness. A drone missile for targeted assassination is an economic plus of g.d.p. It is hard to believe that Keynes was as callous as are his present-day followers, and his oft-quoted remark, “In the long run, we'll all be dead,” may have been an uncanny anticipation of what Marxists would see as capitalism's inner logic.

But one need not invoke Marx, tempting as that might be, to criticize the stimulus. The public spending embodied in the stimulus is “public” in name only, because beyond the defense sector, quintessentially public in America (a shameful admission when one sees how it directly depletes the social safety net and makes a mockery of what should be solemn governmental obligation in its myriad functions), monies go to repairing the private economy, from bailing out criminal conduct to granting subsidies to favored and pampered industries, businesses, and agriculture. The stimulus reinforces wealth-concentration, further nailing down the all-embracing ideological theme of privatization, coloring the definition of government itself and casting working people as entirely

dependent on the fortunes of those above them in the class system (at this point fast approaching an economic-political caste system).

If we could strip the stimulus of its welfare-pretensions and look at Keynesian application as found in the New Deal (still far apart from Marx, because the overriding goal, clearly understood and applauded by FDR, was to save capitalism), the public nature of government appropriation is seen loud and clear, and has nothing to do with Obama-Democratic stimulus. What a time, a time when America did for itself as America, not strewn with corporate logos, a time of infrastructure improvement in which gigantic dams were built and the land was restored and reforested, a time of revival for the human spirit, where the arts were subsidized, theater flourished, poets had food in their stomachs, a time where “public” meant exactly that, the nation caring for its own. Today’s stimulus, in contrast, has been directed ever upward, the sole end of maximizing profit to the already privileged, influential, well-connected. I think Keynes, even in the context of saving capitalism, would have asked for more, authentic public spending, in which trampling on working people was not to the System’s advantage.

My New York Times Comments on Krugman’s article, “The Stimulus Tragedy,” (Feb. 21), and editorial, “What the Stimulus Accomplished,” (Feb. 23), comments same dates, follows:

## I

“In other words, the overall narrative of the stimulus is tragic.” No, I beg to disagree; it was farcical opportunist, misconceived, but hardly tragic. Why focus on size, when the real question is substance or content? PK finds positive aspects of the stimulus, yet does not mention the larger picture which the stimulus as conceived by the administration not only fails to address, but directly contributes to intensifying and worsening: the growing maldistribution of wealth, evidenced in the widening class-differentiation in wealth, income, and power, perhaps the greatest wealth-concentration in American history. And this under the Obama banner of liberalism!

US democracy is being sucked dry by militarism and the defense budget. The financial and housing crises are mere derivatives of all that has gone wrong under a BIPARTISAN consensus: deregulation, global intervention, drone assassination, all with a hefty price tag, which, under different principles and goals, could have been assigned to job creation, a truly vibrant safety net, repair of crumbling infrastructure.

America is a faltering giant, reeling because the phrase “public investment” has been utterly falsified from its New Deal meaning. Reliance on a private sector proven noxious in its peddling of toxic instruments, its obsession with m & a, etc., all because of the ingrained fear of “socialism” (all stringent regulation is labeled thus) has gotten us to this place, and not merely an inadequate stimulus.

## II

It requires courage to face the truth. Neither Republican criticism nor the Democratic stimulus can be defended. Both are bad, and because the stimulus perhaps less so is no reason to praise it. Under Obama we have the greatest disparities in wealth, income, and power in American history, i.e., wealth concentration, along with, and related to, the largest

military budget ever, fueled by two major interventions, nuclear modernization, and an overseas network of bases. Why protect Obama, a POTUS personally engaged in targeted assassination? Why defend Obama, a POTUS who does little for job creation or mortgages foreclosures? Why, especially, look the other way, when Obama is responsible for massive surveillance—the greatest abridgment of civil liberties yet?

NYT can rail against Republicans all it wants, but that merely deflects criticism and analysis from what remains bipartisan continuity on essentials. Neither party demonstrates concern for, literally, the bottom one-half of American society, and Democrats, in particular, display a sophistication that combines liberal rhetoric with permanent war (e.g., drone assassination), and close ties to the financial community. Until you take the measure of Obama, ranging from deregulation to abridgment of civil liberties, to a confrontational stance vis-a-vis China and Russia, it will be hard to accept the impartiality of your news gathering and opinion. I say this as a Times reader for 65 years!

MARCH 3, 2014

### **Ukraine and the IMF**

I welcome Russian intervention in Crimea. No, I'm not a Stalinist wannabe, nor, to paraphrase the current put-down of critics of Israel, a self-hating American; rather, fair is fair in international politics, and invoking a double standard only contributes to the wrongful party's growing aggressiveness, in this case, the US, and its speaking for the Western Community, together a matrix for global privatization under IMF tutelage, supported largely through military means. Yanukovych was no bargain, but he was democratically elected—and to deny that his being tossed out through the use or threat of force was a coup illustrates the double standard.

To deny America's consistent record of shaping the sociopolitical, economic, and ideological forces of counterrevolution, even now, beyond Ukraine, encompassing Latin America (especially Venezuela) and the Far East (Obama's transparent effort through both his Pacific-first strategy and Trans-Pacific Partnership, to encircle, isolate, and maneuver, via the "pivot" of military assets, the confrontation with, China) further exemplifies the double standard. Targeted assassination is merely the cherry on top of the sundae of America's war-provoking hypocrisy. Off-topic? Hardly, for this directly illuminates the situation in Ukraine and particularly Russian military action in Crimea.

Demonize Putin to the heavens (oops, wrong direction) as a master stroke of obfuscation, nicely fitted into the national malaise of denial, so that the National Security State can proceed with impunity in its organization of the mental life of Americans—instilling fear, stimulating xenophobia and ethnocentrism, accustoming us as a people to the doctrine of permanent war—inseparable from the financialization and militarization of American capitalism in a political milieu of deregulation and economic milieu of monopolization. Fortress America looks abroad, its CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations primarily geared to regime change out of the limelight, its reliable international-financial-partner, the IMF operationally the same, where all can see.

"Respectable" intervention is part of the normalization of continued American market-penetration/control and regional stabilization of secure natural-resources holdings and supply. Kiev floating the flag of Privatization would suit Washington fine—indeed, the opening for chaos now

provided, it could settle for nothing less (its hand in fomenting the chaos not to be gainsaid). IMF-itis seems to be a compulsive malady of these hegemonic takeovers at one or two removes.

And when not completely successful they invite forceful rhetoric from POTUS, as in paying the price for interference in US-EU-IMF plans and programs. From where I stand, Putin is understandably angry—at the coup, the potential destabilization of Eastern and Central Europe, the possibility of missiles placed immediately on Russia’s doorstep, the obvious encirclement already seen in US policy toward China.

When I refer to the “militarization of capitalism,” I mean not only enormous Pentagon spending (“military Keynesianism”) as America’s prime stimulus to prevent depression, but military-backed capitalist expansion, specifically, capitalism of the right sort, directed to formerly-socialist areas in need of enlightenment as well as Third World areas undergoing modernization. Hence austerity, trade partnerships, favorable business climate for trade, investment, manufacturing, in sum, the whole kit and caboodle of what has become a process of essentially American-defined globalization.

Poor Ukraine, a throwback to European fascism circa 1950 for significant population segments in its western portion, strains of tense nationalistic feeling as its natural accompaniment, along with the more variegated eastern side, both in language and ethnicity, meaning that any political-structural disruption is bound to encourage division and breakup, a risk the protesters in Kiev and the Western Community as their enablers were willing to take.

Putin’s response is just that; absent the coup, neither maneuvers on the border nor occupation of Crimea would have followed. Yanukovych’s treaty with the EU days before should have settled matters, but the US-EU-IMF got greedy and had the supporters on the ground for dismantling the state and its constitution. We blame Putin for own illegal actions, only the most recent case of regime change.

March 30 is the Crimean referendum on separation. At this point, Kiev wants its cake and eat it, having little love for Crimea’s East and aware the feeling is fully reciprocated, and aware, further, the Crimean East cannot be accommodated into the EU paradigm (including IMF provisions), yet prizing unification as economic bait for inviting international capital to exploit an integrated territory following IMF ground-rules. The temptation to keep Crimea is great, as testimony to the authority and sovereignty of the Kiev government.

Yet, I’m rooting for Putin, Russia, and Crimea, free from any illusions of their impeccable record of democracy and freedom, because arrayed on the other side are world historical forces under US leadership which articulate the policies of repression, waste, intervention, widening class differences, and hegemonic-oriented global military engagement, all more menacing both to domestic society and the global order. Obama’s braggadocio will hopefully prove unavailing, and further belligerence on his part may direct the world’s attention to his recreational past time of poring over hit lists and personally ordering drone assassinations. Not a comforting thought to have him call the shots, a moral void at the helm of the ship of state.

My New York Times Comments on the NYT editorial, “What is Russia’s Aim in Ukraine?” (Mar. 1), and Alison Smale and Steven Erlanger, “Russian Military Seizes Crimea,” (Mar. 2), follow:

## I

The Times's partiality is obvious, as in the phrase "outrageously provocative" to describe war games near the border, when, in fact, a democratically elected president was deposed in a coup—somewhat truer to the words than the Russian action.

Nor is there a word on US intervention in support of, or making possible, the coup. Like Obama's targeted assassination, NYT overlooks war crimes and gives Obama a free pass—but let Russia or China or Venezuela step over the line and bango (!) to the barricades. I'd value an honest investigation into whether or not fascists are playing a meaningful role in Ukraine. I'd also like editorial comment on Yanukovich's negotiated treaty with the EU, shortly before he was forced to flee. He may be corrupt, even a downright scoundrel, but the takeover was unjust and it is doubtful the US has clean hands.

NYT, the possibility of cataclysmic war, because of Obama belligerence and chauvinism (as in the Pacific-first geostrategic mobilization against China), cannot be gainsaid. Closer attention to Washington, in its war-provocative record (after all, Iraq and Afghanistan are not imaginary), is a solemn obligation of a free press—even if emotionally you are rooting for the supposedly good guys. Either that, or drop the pretense of neutrality and admit your desire for the renewal of the Cold War, even heated up. Obama's massive surveillance and destruction of civil liberties far exceeds any acts committed by Putin.

## II

I agree with Ryzhkov when he warns, "in case they unleash the dogs on us." Crimea should be welcomed as fleshing out the West's continuous intervention on behalf of IMF austerity measures. What is Iraq, what is Afghanistan, but blatant US global hegemonic moves that, if comparable moves had been pursued by Russia or China instead, we would have seen, not shouting matches but dangerous armed hostilities.

The arrogance of the West, particularly that of Obama and the US, is unsettling, a hand-on-the-trigger mentality all for what? Austerity for the losers, privatization for all—as meanwhile the perfect climate is created in America for half-trillion dollar "defense" expenditures and a massive surveillance program that reduces traditional civil liberties to zero. Our self-righteousness—and this is why Crimea is welcome—becomes advertised to the world. The Ukrainian coup is, in your report, deftly termed an "ouster," and Obama's warnings about violations of international law ring hollow when he personally authorizes targeted assassinations. Is Putin any more a war criminal than Obama?

I should like to see Crimea secede from Ukraine. But more, I should like to see Ukraine fall under IMF terms and influence, and let the IMF, the West, the US bail it out financially. Since 1980, who has been a better world citizen, the US or Russia? Compare the # of world military bases. Compare the # of efforts at regime change. Compare CIA and KGB. Self-righteousness on the march.

MARCH 6, 2014

## **Hegemonic Exceptionalism**

Ukraine came along just as Americans' fears instilled through the climate of counterterrorism, critically important to inducing complaisance and complicity with respect to US interventions, massive defense spending, and the demiurge for remaining on top (what The Times euphemistically called today [3-5], speaking positively, "credibility and global leadership"), were beginning to flag, a waning interest in global conquest periodically requiring shock treatment to keep intense and self-justificatory. "Came along," however, is obviously incorrect: America had been fishing in Ukrainian troubled waters for some time, aware of the potential for heightening Cold War tensions at the center of the US's international posture. Imperialism is not a cliché, but through time and geopolitical-economic experience, its contours must be redrawn to satisfy a meaningful account of its practice. Lenin's analysis may have accurately described the late-19th century world, say through World War I and into the 'Twenties, in which markets, investments, and raw materials were driving forces in themselves. Even America, in contradistinction to traditional imperialism involving tariffs and the seeds of war, had its own peculiar brand, what Gallagher and Robinson famously called, "the imperialism of free trade."

But that has changed, for with markets, etc., has come since World War II a growing ideological factor, the ideology, or better, psychopathology, of power-dominance-recognition, for its own sake, granted as making easier and seemingly legitimizing the traditional form, yet also a reification of toughness fitting an authoritarian collective-personality structure. Domination of others has become habituated in, and the constant expectation of, the American mind-set, whose origins may have rested in capitalism's shaping of the social structure on hierarchical class lines, salted with the historical presence of slavery then segregation as well as the xenophobic attitude toward immigrants. Whatever the alchemic traces of interior repression—and here the treatment of industrial labor, especially from the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 through Steel (1919) and the Sit-Down later, along with the suppression of the Bonus Marchers in '32, have to be added to the mix—the predisposition to Exceptionalism, actively translated into power-terms, hegemony pure-and-simple, if need be against all comers, characterizes both policy and societal mentality in increasingly intensified form since the aftermath of World War II.

In a formalistic democracy, violated with impunity at every turn by the leadership structure (invariable bipartisan continuity) itself and speaking for the business and military communities-of-interest as well, shibboleths of freedom remain conspicuous, and simultaneously are negated by the regimentation of mind, with the result—pardon the neologism—of the ideologization of US policy top-to-bottom. Yes, markets, but, e.g., the Trans-Pacific Partnership, like NAFTA before it, and who knows what, with respect to the EU after, serves a greater purpose, as though American capitalism, for starters, must be fully militarized if it is to survive on terms acceptable to its ruling groups. Capitalism and Cold War become reciprocally defined in the modern era. Here Lenin is not abandoned so much as updated, with the ideology of hegemony for its own sake as a motivational factor facilitating yet also TRUMPING the original concerns.

John Kerry, whom we might term an ultra-imperialist statesman, were he not the new version of the Tony-Blair lapdog, is scurrying around Kiev extending promises of billion dollar loan guarantees and showering affection on the new "government" expected to do US-EU-IMF's bidding, along with his warning statements to Putin of just retribution for Russian (the term

“Kremlin” increasingly colors media accounts, perhaps to encourage a knee-jerk reaction confusing “Russia” and “Soviet,” Putin and Stalin) actions in Crimea. Who needs his Assistant Secretary of State’s use of the “f” word, chastising the EU for not demonstrating greater belligerence toward Russia, at the same time practically outlining the new Kiev government leadership which came (magically?) into existence, when Kerry, as Obama’s alter ego, is fully capable of conducting a one-man display of unmitigated hostility gaining the world’s attention? One almost suspects Kerry is using Ukraine to verify his Cold War-hardness credentials, as a means of appealing to a reactionary electorate in a return bid for the presidency.

In fact, everyone seems to be using Ukraine as the validation of America’s greatness. Peter Baker in *The Times* had some choice quotes coming out of Congress: Dick Durbin, Democratic stalwart, on Putin, “[Kick] him out of the G-8”; Lindsey Graham, “Create a democratic noose around Putin’s Russia”; Marco Rubio, “Revisit the missile defense shield”; Mike Rogers, “Cancel Sochi [G-8]”. Rubio last night (3-4) spoke darkly of making Russia pay “the consequences” for its actions—he and Obama on the same page. Why the need for such validation? Why the recurring use of “TOUGHNESS”? I think psychopathology is an appropriate diagnosis here (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate at my elbow), in which “psychopathy” refers to “mental disorder; esp: extreme mental disorder marked usu. by egocentric and antisocial behavior.” Nicely fits the bill, show toughness in all things, even when, and especially when, your actions are morally and/or existentially wrong, as in: intervention (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and a host of lesser examples, particularly in the Hemisphere), regime change (as now, in Ukraine), targeted assassination (the Obama-Brennan weapon of choice in the War on Terrorism), domestic surveillance and worldwide eavesdropping—you get the idea (!) given the extensibility of the enumeration, much of which remains unknown given USG’s extreme lack of transparency and accountability.

The upshot? More tension, more stirring up of blind anger, more deflection from caring about—let alone wanting to solve—the problems at home, problems largely created by the militaristic patterns of thought (substitute “poor” for “enemy” and callously press down hard) and outright military outlays that have distorted national priorities. Taking a swipe at Putin (or Xi in the background, for surely Team Obama has China in its sights, with treatment of Russia the handy precedent for moving next on China) is psychically more rewarding than meeting the needs of unemployment, infrastructure, health, surcease from ever-panting over the triumphs of war. The greatest danger to America is that democracy will break out at home.

My New York Times Comments follow, this time the most recent first, then arranged chronologically, all part of a seemingly renewed Cold War that never ended in the first place. On (I) editorial, “A Rational Response to Ukraine’s Crisis,” 3-5-14; (II) editorial, “Russia’s Aggression,” 3-3-14; (III) Peter Baker, “Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Reign In Russia,” 3-3-14; (IV) Steven Lee Myers, Ellen Barry, and Alan Cowell, “Citing ‘Coups’ in Ukraine, Putin Reserves Right to Use Force,” 3-4-14.

I

Ah, but the US does have an “interest in turning Kiev against Moscow.” The Times blithely ignores America’s role—by now well-documented—in if not creating then certainly exacerbating the tensions, indeed Cold War tensions, in Ukraine as an EPICENTER for stimulating an East-West conflict bordering on confrontation. The Times refuses to concede



the illegality under international law of the Kiev government. It also patently overlooks the—again well-documented—fascist underpinnings of the opposition forces and even leadership.

Why this journalistic charade? Isn't it evident that Ukraine-Crimea is on a continuum with Iraq and Afghanistan, as part of the pattern of US hegemonic political-ideological momentum, and that, as we see in Obama's "pivot" to the Pacific and Hagel's budgetary priorities the US is pursuing a global geostrategic vision/paradigm of continued intervention and the preparation for and execution of a state of permanent war? Strangely, that may sound radical to say, but yet goes to the heart of Obama's, his national-security advisers', and military planners' foreign-policy framework.

The US needs a self-imposed damoclean sword, to keep its confidence high (The Times even dwells on the importance to America of CREDIBILITY, code for toughness and forcible imposition of US demands), insinuate the texture of fear into the American mind-set, and therefore justify outlandish military expenditures and concrete expeditions. Massive surveillance, anyone?!

## II

"Russia's Aggression" is a provocative title to the editorial, considering that Yanukovich was the victim of a coup (no other word will do). Why such one-sided treatment? Why fail to address—at least investigate—the role of the US in exacerbating tensions, along with its quick recognition of the Kiev govt? Do you think Putin would have taken the actions he did, had not Yanukovich been illegally thrown out (remember he WAS democratically elected)? And nowhere is there discussion of the IMF, circling like a vulture ready to pounce.

Let the US and EU pick up the tab for Ukraine's indebtedness, and let it become absorbed into NATO, so that missiles could be placed on the border of Russia. Surely that is what Obama wants. Yes, tensions are increasing. John Kerry has become America's Tony Blair, a lap dog for POTUS, issuing threats, talking tough.

US-EU-Kiev knew the coup would elicit Putin's response. Perhaps that was what was wanted, as a way of putting America on a still firmer war footing, more than already in the political-ideological context of counterterrorism. Yes, we must demonize Putin, to hide the actions of Obama, ranging from targeted assassination to massive surveillance (one, making Obama a certified war criminal, the other, making him guilty of violating civil liberties unparalleled in US history).

Perhaps NYT has become jaded with respect to freedom and democracy. Sorry A.O. Sulzberger isn't around, as when he published The Pentagon Papers, to see.

## III

My original posting, last evening, in response to this editorial, was unable to take into account overnight articles, notably, Peter Baker's, "Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Reign In Russia," in which we see more clearly Obama's deep-seated grounding in Cold War mentality, as though hoping for a Crimea so as to press confrontation with Russia, always implied in his presidency.

Now his critics want more, including Durbin, a bipartisan show of toughness loathsome in its jingoistic gut-reactionary, yes, fascistic, display of war-readiness, to which POTUS subscribes while pretending coolness. Baker's quotes from Rubio, Corker, Graham, are right out of the Hitlerian playbook: the sweet smell of aggression, smashing Putin's face in a rage of self-righteousness.

Russia intervention in Crimea: what was US intervention with overwhelming force in Iraq and Afghanistan—a boy scout outing? Our president sponsors drone assassination. We intervene in countless areas, including Ukraine itself, to bring about regime change and clamp down IMF prescriptions on those economies. We allocate yearly nearly a half-trillion to defense and have near-200 global military bases. Washington, under Obama even more ambitiously than Bush, demands and seeks to maintain world hegemonic leadership in political-economic-military-ideological terms, what Fulbright called an arrogance of power, yet far greater than he could imagine. Here Kerry as errand boy for imperialism is a disgrace. War, anyone?!

#### IV

How take US position seriously until it admits Yanukovych ouster was in fact a COUP in violation of international law, until US admits that Kiev government gained power through Western Ukraine elements composed in fact of FASCIST units (now sitting in the Parliament) whose antecedents go back to Waffen SS units and the clear evidence of anti-Semitism (“Jews Live Here” painted on buildings in the region) in their activities.

Putin's remarks are so much more cogent than Obama's deceptive blather, including both his rejection of US-Western intimidation as in politicizing the G-8 meeting and his disavowal of the desire to widen the conflict and open fire. The US is looking for trouble. It requires an exercise in demonization in order to inflate its own national self-esteem. Not coincidentally, the Ukraine situation occurs at the same time as Afghanistan seeks to come out from under US military penetration.

The Empire is experiencing fissures. Exceptionalism is being questioned, as is the divine-right of intervention. Fittingly, Putin is the only world leader denouncing fascism, while Obama openly supports it (under the euphemistic label of “freedom fighters”). Yes, his comment, “All threats against Russia are counterproductive and harmful,” signals a willingness to stand up to America, which in turn exposes US gut-reactionary striking out at whatever impedes our global hegemonic claims.

Whether Ukraine or Venezuela, subverting constitutional government, anyone?!

MARCH 11, 2014

#### **US Military-Corporate Globalization**

As in my title, I am starting with the larger background for the discussion of Ukraine: 1) proclivities toward war suggests not simply the continuous historical record of interventions, but, in this case, a premeditated framework directed to placing Ukraine in the context of a renewed, or rather, intensified Cold War, absorbing it into the Western orbit for both commercial and military

reasons, placing it under IMF discipline and bringing NATO to the border of Russia; and 2) military-corporate globalization suggests, beyond the scope of US-geopolitical intended dominance, the changing character of American capitalism, which despite, or because of, market fundamentalism, is adding a significant component to its internal composition, its structural-ideological militarization.

Ukraine represents a vast ideological battlefield with ethnocentrism (We vs. Them) running in high gear, in which America finds—indeed, has fertilized/ watered—the ideal ground for revitalizing the somewhat flagging spirit of, and concrete preparation for, the Cold War. But WHY now? This boost to the Cold War, rendering it perhaps more than ever crucial, is the US's perceived declining status (the hidden fear of the political-business-military leadership) as the unchallenged superpower in ordering and principally benefiting from the world system. What I termed “hegemonic exceptionalism,” in a recent article bears on the current situation. For the US, Ukraine has significance in its own right: a market/investment area ripe for economic colonization by America and its “friends and allies,” the corollary, a free-fire zone (figuratively) for the implementation of IMF principles and operations. That itself, a further source of enrichment, ensures wedding “friends and allies” closer to America and its geostrategic (in addition to geopolitical) paradigm of globalization. Opening areas for exploitation renews the bonds of friendship. “Friends and allies” is a formula (the integration of economic and military aims, brought to fruition in NATO) that requires constant reinvigoration: a sharing in opportunities, or what a cynic might declare, plunder.

Please note: when I say above, “perceived declining status,” I mean that the world system is changing. The US no longer exercises unilateral dominance, militarily and commercially, but is part now of a multi-polar international order, with the rise of rival powers and the industrialization of emerging nations. The world is seemingly in rebellion, escaping its grasp; hence, the urgency in advantageously defining and promoting globalization, and placing still greater emphasis on international bodies (the IMF and World Bank) to carry out its policies and wishes.

Point one, then, on Ukraine, market and investment penetration (the purely economic consideration, which also takes in natural-resources extraction), but now point two (the military factor): Whenever EU is mentioned, NATO must be factored into the analysis. Here Ukraine is the vestibule to gaining military access to Russia. America deliberately interferes in Ukraine's internal affairs for the long-standing purpose, in addition to economic considerations, of, more important still, having missile bases on the Russian border, both for an intimidatory function and as the ideological symbolism of its capacity to act with impunity. Strike fear into the heart of Putin—only, however, US-EU-IMF-NATO apparently have misjudged their man, which becomes totally unacceptable, not least in that perhaps other nations, other leaders, will begin to talk back, begin to question how world power is structured and arranged, how American-centered power politics creates impoverishment, encourages dependence, in nations thus penetrated through America's commercial-military presence, not to mention the ever-present threat of regime change—as has just occurred in Ukraine—when opposition to hegemonic exceptionalism is expressed.

This is the specter gnawing in the American breast. In more familiar terms, failure in Ukraine calls to mind, and denotes for policy-makers, the necessity of taking a firm stand (the widespread dissemination of the cry for “toughness” and, in Obama-national security-Pentagonese, always enhancing “credibility,” lest the Empire quickly unravel! We are in the midst of the sway over the

American mind of the falling-domino theory, a relic of the original stages of the Cold War and then Vietnam, which has been used to whip the American people into line (it, and the pervasive anticommunism it buttresses, has never really left us—as a substratum of political-ideological belief), and ensure a steady spirit of confrontation. Lose here (because Ukraine becomes the geopolitical-ideological contact-point with Russia) and, in true domino fashion, this will start the dominoes falling worldwide—and the Empire shrinking.

Better therefore to be proactive; create the situation of inevitable confrontation (the NATO advances, missiles on Russia's doorstep, for which Putin undoubtedly would oppose) through the coup d'état displacing Yanukovych, and in that way ensure the solidification of America's world position. Russia must be rendered subordinate on the international stage, the operative word heard in policy-circles, "isolated," but with the hint in the background, "dismemberment" as well. And with this subordination, Putin must be delegitimized and demonized, together a FIRST step to maintaining a global architecture of US unilateral dominance. I say "first step," because, with Obama, reaffirming American global hegemony seriously enlarges the boundaries of the Cold War mental-set through the inclusion of China as a second primal antagonist—and standing up to China and Russia, in turn, signals to others, on one hand, potential capitalist rivals (such as Japan, EU members themselves), and on the other, emergent Third World nations (along with India and Brazil) in process of industrializing, that market penetration and the activities surrounding it must be conducted within a US-defined framework.

Again, please note: I mention China because I think Ukraine is about more than internal arrangements, the fascistic influences of the spear-carriers responsible on the ground for the coup, which in any case to which Washington gladly cooperates and does not seem at all to object, and is about more than even Russia, as significant as that factor is (for the reasons mentioned); one cannot discount the broader picture, that Ukraine represents—i.e., is symbolic of—the wider global view, always implicit from the start, that the Cold War includes the isolation and containment of China as well. Ukraine is an inseparable link in the chain of wiping the slate clean of putative Evil in the world. Isolating Russia, and not China, accomplishes little, even if, in their franker moments, American leaders recognize that communism, with respect to both, is no longer an issue. What is, is global hegemony, a purpose if not an obsession of the US from which Russia and China stand in the way. That the expanded Cold War includes China's isolation and containment can be seen in the importance Obama attaches to his Pacific-first strategy, the "pivot" of military "assets" to that theater, which makes China a primary object of concern more than ever before. Here throw in the Trans-Pacific Partnership as frosting on the Cold War cake.

Much of this Imperial-vision rests on holding the line in Ukraine, displaying a requisite toughness, as if to say, the domino-theory is alive, well, believable, and fully subscribed to in American policy. Russia and China, by their very being, signify the de-centering of the global structure of power. It is for this reason that Ukraine becomes a pawn on the world chess board, perhaps the Vietnam of the early 21st Century, except that communism becomes now a fabricated, subliminal issue intended to garner hostility toward Russia and China. No, Putin is not Ho, but Obama is JFK-LBJ rolled into one, though more contemptuous of civil liberties and more personally engaged in pulling the trigger (targeted assassinations) than either of the other two were or thought themselves able to pull off. Putin, not Ho, in the way the latter stood courageously

against overwhelming force, is not simon-pure, but his actions here on Crimea are credible and, I suggest, even creditable (admittedly an unpopular view, perhaps even among radicals).

If, as I maintain, Ukraine is incidental to the US confrontation with not only Russia, but also China, we see a cosmic struggle in real time. Add to that US-NATO bases on Ukraine's eastern border, and perhaps Ukrainian membership in NATO, along with America's gigantic production and show of military force, even telegraphing to the world that its militarism trumps internal societal well-being (as in sacrifices to the social safety net), and one sees Putin's every right to be concerned. This flaunting of military power, which the world sees as the deliberate weakening of social obligations to its own population, is taken as a warning of intent to expand, aggress—the serious business of normalizing imperialism in the context of circumscribing dissent at home the better to act on the doctrine of permanent war abroad. America cannot divest itself of, or even step away from, the utility of instilling fear among its own people. We see this with counterterrorism, but antecedently, and to the same effect, with anticommunism. For both, the utility lies in facilitating a further rightward ideological shift than has already been steadily in evidence in the last six-seven decades following World War II.

Instilling fear acts to retard if not paralyze the development of political consciousness. The utility is that of fulfilling the wish-list of America's corporate as well as military elite, for one the pattern of continued deregulation, monopolization, and pernicious, largely unpunished, conduct (together providing a basis for the intensification in the mal-distribution of wealth), and for the other, manna from heaven in the showering of billions on ever more lethal weaponry, bases, interventions, nuclear modernization, agility in mounting programs of regime-change (an increasing shift to paramilitary operations) and, withal, the militarization of the American conscience and consciousness, so that anything goes in the fulfillment of American policy: rendition, assassination, torture, espionage, witch-hunts, and now, surveillance and eavesdropping on an unprecedented scale, all made acceptable, even praised, as the body politic march in psychopathological lock-step. To complete this overview, holding the foregoing in mind, I would say a word about the nature of American capitalism, as relevant to what is happening in Ukraine.

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Capitalism cannot hack it on its own as the exclusive world economic framework; it requires the global counterrevolutionary intervention of an American-led coalition of compatible political economies all of which subscribe to, the while compelling others to fall in line with, International Monetary Fund rules of the game. The World Bank is handmaiden to the enterprise, but the underlying method of enforcement is American military power, a clear sign of US intention that, not simply capitalism, particularly in its mixed form, but structured around the central principle of privatization and its reinforcing corollaries, is acceptable. Capitalism of the right sort, that is, with built-in factors ensuring social control, both mental and if needed physical, an hierarchical-arranged class system, wealth-concentration and trickle-down forms of presumed societal betterment, and loosely-defined austerity, directed at both "fiscal integrity" and assured shrinkage of the social safety net—the latter especially for habituating working people to an uncritical acceptance of war, submission to business leadership, contentment with their lot and what is defined as the national purpose.

Please also note: I say “loosely-defined austerity” because austerity is CODE for depressing the rights and power of working people. Austerity sounds like an accountant or book-keeper’s call for a balanced budget, but it is in fact an attack on working people and on the public functions of government itself. In America, if austerity had earlier carried the day, there would never have been a New Deal. By now, we find sufficient continuous impoverishment to suggest the makings of a caste, rather than class, system. At issue with austerity, is wealth-concentration and wealth-distribution. Republicans carry the water for this concept/condition, but Democrats are sipping from the same bucket.

Capitalism in America presumes its own inner vitality. This has been focused on privatization, which is held to be conterminous with freedom and democracy and, by extension, serves to define the core of human potentiality. One might demur, but to no avail, that quite the opposite is true: a privatization of mind which ensures separation, thereby constituting the matrix for alienation rooted in the commodity structure of social relations and human identity. If privatization fails to describe the autonomous individual, the aforementioned inner vitality of American capitalism also is not sufficient for overcoming business-cycle volatility, a condition of underconsumption due to class-structured differences of wealth, income, and power, and tendencies toward, war, intervention, and commercial-financial rivalries.

Hello, then, the Ukraine-Crimea imbroglio, which has been created through the US and Western thirst for market expansion underpinned by America’s own geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis Russia. The latter is perhaps not fully shared by the EU (countries that had experienced war at first-hand 75 years previous), of rolling back Russia, first, then, the big prize, China, by any and all means short of nuclear holocaust—at least for now, given its psychopathological premises of anticommunism, no longer even applicable to those nations, and counterrevolution, still in play in Latin America. I say “at least for now,” because some of the impassioned rhetoric of kill, kill, kill, coming out of Washington and the media suggest a colossal death-wish born of suppressed guilt for the harm inflicted on others, or more straightforwardly, inner emptiness of purpose and spirit, a nihilism in the interstices of militarism woven into its very texture.

To paraphrase Sartre’s thought in his essay, “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” If the Ukraine Crisis didn’t exist, we’d have to invent it, as indeed, through working for the overthrow of Yanukovych, we did! And who better to put in his place than Dmytro Yarosh, leader of Right Sector, an avowed fascist group, now reported to be planning a name change in order to erase memories of its anti-Semitism and strong-arm tactics. We certainly know how to pick them, a dictator for every occasion, now, no longer a fascistic excrescence of capitalism but incorporated into its body, front and center. In truth, the Obama administration, coasting on its putative sophistication (helped mightily by the liberal rhetoric of Ben Rhodes), is here losing its touch, screaming about Crimea’s illegitimate acts in violation of the Ukraine Constitution, when, shortly before, a duly-elected president was unceremoniously tossed out, thereby triggering this whole series of events. A coup d’etat has been transformed into legitimacy itself (as is any regime change plotted by USG) in this political-ideological universe of inverted meaning. This enables Obama to stand as the champion of democracy and human rights as his skulduggery throws the world out of balance.

Had not America’s animus toward Russia been in the works for some time (say, beginning with the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, followed by the Siberian Intervention), one might have thought this drawing of the line in the sand came on suddenly this past week. Instead, we helped to create

the situation, knowing full well deposing Yanukovych would force Putin's hand, a course of action he would not have taken otherwise, in the absence of the coup. Putin had accepted the terms of Yanukovych's agreement with the EU, which was cancelled when he was forced out of office. The US then stood ready to pounce, in this case its "friends and allies" being among others Svoboda and Right Sector, which not even Washington denies (silently, to itself) their fascist heritage and leanings.

Obama is not alone in supporting this putsch-operation. He never is, given that he surrounds himself by among the most militaristic set of advisers, quite the equal of the earlier Neo-Cons Wolfowitz and Perle, or going back to McCarthy's dynamic duo Cohen and Schine, seen for some time, including Brennan, Clapper, Rice, Power, and, seemingly new to the game, but making up for lost time, John Kerry. And as the Guardian reported, Hillary Clinton, who deserves the title, all-purpose harridan when it comes to the demonstration of toughness in foreign policy (mine, not the Guardian), in one of her pre-election forays proving to all her mettle, stated in California this week, that Putin reminded her of Hitler. With some backing-and-filling, she said Putin was not Hitler but "reminiscent" of him—she, a worthy successor to Obama who thrives on war. In her case, we recall her advice on the Afghanistan surge, even exceeding the Pentagon request. Undoubtedly she will also continue the onward military thrust to the Pacific, i.e., Obama's "pivot" to isolate and confront China, the geostrategic framework being applied first to Russia now more than ever with respect to Ukraine and Crimea. Factor in the Congressional War Hawks of both parties, holding that Obama is too soft (excellent testimony to how far Right America has become, when Obama is attacked for losing Ukraine), and a media biased out of mind in its coverage of these events, and one sees what I termed America's war proclivities, barely if at all concealed in the self-righteous narrative coming out of Washington.

Yes, this is serious business. The US-EU-IMF line-up smells blood: Putin/Hitler (Hillary simply voiced what the propaganda machinery subliminally has been pushing for some time, even the Olympics not providing an interruption) and 1939 all over again, wherein the West must not give in to appeasement, but stand firm against totalitarianism. If only we could see ourselves! Obama, Man-of-War. No, not the Portuguese aquatic nemesis, with its purple balloon and long tentacles, but the ever more venomous kind, tentacles reaching around the world, targeted assassination here, paramilitary operations there, massive surveillance at home, eavesdropping abroad, a CIA, as this week in Washington, covering up its decade of torture, rendition, waterboarding, and POTUS, stomping on civil liberties, as in his use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, and we, after helping to overthrow the government in Ukraine, claim that Crimea acts unconstitutionally in seeking a popular referendum to get out of the clutches of Kiev. Events are moving quickly. I have two New York Times Comments, one, on Allan Cowell's article, "As E.U. Meets, Crimea Moves to Hold Vote on Joining Russia," March 6, the other, perhaps more to the point on Putin's sense of having been betrayed by the US and the West, given sanction of, and support for, the coup itself, but also the ultimate placement of NATO installations on Russia's borders, this in addition to accusations of aggression and distortions of the political-ideological composition of the forces which overthrew Yanukovych, on Steven Myers and Steven Erlanger's article, "Tensions Roil in Crimea Amid Mediation Efforts," March 8, both of which follow:

I

The term “consequences,” whether used by Kerry, Cameron, or Rubio, indicates a deep-seated admiration of force and desire for war, a political-ideological blindness, willful blindness, all of which can be said of Obama as well, to the obvious US-EU-IMF power play that with impunity deposed a democratically elected president in Ukraine via organized protests containing verifiable fascist elements from Svoboda, Right Sector, etc. This contempt for constitutional processes, revealing the arch-hypocrisy of the West, only serves to reinforce its powers of denial. Now, Crimea goes to the polls on Mar. 16, and it will be interesting to see the sophistry in condemning that election/referendum while boasting that Kiev is the very model of democracy and constitutionalism.

I hope Crimea pulls out, not because I believe Russia and Putin are virtue incarnate, or because I want the return of Stalinism, but because the West, esp. the US, needs confrontation to awaken them to their thirst for global hegemony. Crimea is about Ukraine, it is about Russia, but it is also about CHINA, to which the US is busily encircling with its “pivot” of military assets and Trans-Pacific Partnership.

America thrives on the Cold War, which has not only never ended but remains the basis for US paramilitary (CIA-JSOC) operations for regime change globally, and the use of counterterrorism as pretext for domestic surveillance and the National Security State. Obama is more a KGB-type than Putin and more war-prone.

## II

Putin is demonized as lawbreaker, war provocateur, Stalin-Lenin wannabe, when, as Myers brings out, the move into Crimea occurred—indeed was even thought of—only after Yanukovich was thrown out. US-EU interpretation to the contrary, this was a COUP! It also destroyed, by his ejection from constitutional office, the agreement already reached with the EU. Internal forces—Svoboda, Right Sector, etc.—did not want the agreement, they wanted instead a takeover—yes, a fascist-inclined takeover. Only then did Putin even begin to act.

When your reporter points to Putin’s disappointment, a good observation, it was because he felt betrayed by the West, including the US, for supporting the coup—and for wanting an IMF-NATO sphere of influence established, wholly disrespecting Russia’s needs. Had the coup not occurred, Putin would have accepted the EU-Ukraine agreement.

Frankly, which side is the aggressor, US-EU-IMF or Russia? The photo of Kiev protesters, with shields and helmets, suggests interference and planning from outside—and the record of fascist leanings by the instigators on the scene is beyond dispute. Putin was right; Yanukovich’s withdrawal of security was a fatal mistake. Evidence of sharpshooters coming from opposition ranks is piling up. An ugly coup for what? Between IMF privatization and installing missiles on Russia’s border we have the answer, a studied return to the Cold War dovetailed with Obama’s Asia “pivot” also to isolate and contain China.



MARCH 14, 2014

## **The Sociology of Hegemonic Politics**

Sociological methodology, ordinarily fetishistically treated as productive of knowledge in its own right, actually has value in shaping critical analysis of power systems, repression, the pursuit of hegemony—provided it addresses the social system per se, and not peripheral matters. Treating events, practices, ideas in isolation—what we are habituated in doing, as part of the intended fragmentation of reality by which our lives, through long practice of the political culture, are governed so as to accommodate to the needs of ruling groups—obscures from consciousness their interrelated nature. We seem to abound in contradictions, when in reality one can speak meaningfully of a core of society, from which and through which the variegated strands of experience, the structure of institutions, the defining goals of the social order come to a focus, radiating from the center. This is a central insight of Marxian social analysis (although divorced from revolutionary action, which, as so much of Marx's analytical writings can, and perhaps should, be, it makes good sense for all straightforward discussion of social systems in clarifying the nature of their ideologies, political economies, class dynamics and relationships).

Where am I coming from, and where, heading? More than fifty years ago, in Cambridge, I became a close friend of Fritz Pappenheim, a refugee scholar, interned in a Spanish concentration camp until Paul Tillich was able to intercede for him, and who published *The Alienation of Modern Man* (Monthly Review Press). Inspired by Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Fritz wrote of the societal core of capitalism as rooted in the COMMODITY, in which exchange value trumps use value, and in which human beings relate to each other as commodities (what's in it for me?) and in terms of their ownership of commodities (the act of ownership defining their very being). From this, much else follows: obviously such traits as possessiveness, using one another as objects of gain, and, although neither Marx nor Fritz mentioned, a fundamental ethnocentrism: the we/they dichotomy, which in turn leads to, and creates the opportunity for, an authoritarian structure, i.e., the hierarchical organization of classes and the prerogatives of wealth, translating into power, that follow as embedded throughout the institutional life of the society.

Yes, commodity structure, but that is almost too arcane in reasoning about current sociopolitical-economic-ideological-military dynamics (by my reasoning, themselves unified and integrated, stemming from the core), so permit me a substitution, still in the spirit of the analysis, in which commodity gives way in theory—but remains at the foundation virtually of everything, from epistemology to culture to psychology—to privatization, itself implemented through what I recently called in a *CounterPunch* article “hegemonic exceptionalism,” the exceptionalism-aspect carrying the full blossoming of ethnocentrism, America a nation apart, superior, practically the right arm of God. Hegemony is another matter, for whether integral to the core—capitalism as inherently hegemonic, necessary to its survival/expansion—or a means consciously adopted following out the logic of the system but capable of being subdued in order to promote and facilitate cooperation, unlikely given the historic importance of capitalist rivalries, can be left open as a cumulative policy-decision. In any case, for advanced capitalism, and for the US in particular, hegemony is such ingrained practice as to be no longer questioned. Whole frameworks of policy-making, domestic and foreign, dovetailing fiscal, monetary, trade, etc., and the allocation of priorities favoring what are deemed national-security protections and issues, then come into being to articulate the power of the State, today, at this moment, internally, massive surveillance, externally, a consecutive record of

interventions, now, the Ukraine, as the most recent. In answer to the question, where am I heading with this, it is to keep the concept of interrelatedness in tow, as we look briefly at Ukraine.

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I believe we are on the road to neo-fascism. No, this is not the road to Mandalay, or that of Bob, Bing, and Dorothy Lamour, to some tropical paradise, but one whose destination is the Corporate-Militarist State, better known by the euphemistic expression, the National Security State, to instill fear in the people that massive surveillance is permissible and recommended, and that only an even more massive “Defense” Establishment can ward off any and all dangers “Out There”: the militarization of America’s perspective on the world and its security, influence, and expansion within it. A globalization of US self-righteousness matches the globalization of its geopolitical assumptions and strategies, themselves in sync with trade policy, paramilitary objectives of regime change, and the use of international bodies (IMF, World Bank, etc.) for the generalized promotion and articulation of national power. This power, however, is not for ceremonial flag-raising, but subtended to serve in every way imaginable (in recent times, waterboarding and an exotic menu of torture through an official Agency of USG) the capitalist system as the efflorescence of the core.

In our societal myopia (a political-structural induction of false consciousness through the introjection of ruling-groups’ policies and ideology, making for complicity and accommodation) we see such signs of the times as Obama’s personal authorization of drone assassination, the use of trade embargoes, espionage and subversion, and direct military pressure, with or without specific, announced intervention, and worse, shock-and-awe softening up operations, each as discrete, and therefore isolated signs, rather than as indications of a unified framework, itself the cumulative developmental process promoting their integration. In this framework one notes America’s obsession with social control and hierarchical class-ordering at home and counterrevolution and market penetration abroad, a formula quite as suggestive as the Junker “marriage of iron and rye” of having now embarked down the road to neo-fascism. The term “neo-fascism” is not histrionic, and rather quite precise in describing for America the preliminaries to that destination: the interpenetration of business and government, signifying statist underpinnings to capitalism resulting in its integrated militarization and monopolization, then connected with a foreign policy featuring their fusion as the foundation of national power, in which this emergent ideological-structural formation, a societal process still in-the-making and not yet fully realized, is predisposed to global hegemony and holding the cards to its achievement. Massive surveillance, undeniably fascistic, as is a CIA (POTUS applauding in the background) roaming the world at will—and the US, against its charter—despite the denials and cover-ups of liberals, are but two aces awaiting the third for gin.

We are dancing on the edge, my qualifier, NEO-fascism, being an act of charity, or simply a desire not to exaggerate—unnecessary to begin with, because the situation is bad enough. Ukraine is just one more mile marker on the road, an example of fastening on, after so-much grub work, the situation to activate the Cold War one decisive notch for higher stakes than usual. We are not talking terrorism here, we’re talking—in the best John Foster Dulles tradition—ROLLBACK, even dismemberment, destruction, or the relegation to the second tier, of Russia. As I’ve written, this is no longer a matter only of imperialism’s usual triad—markets, investments, raw materials—even though, at bottom, for various reasons Ukraine is suitable on that score for aggressive penetration (one being the enforcement of IMF ground-rules as an encroachment which would profit “friends and allies” as well, thus via their opportunities cementing further their economies, gratitude, and

armies to our own). Beyond the economic, we have reached the point of believing our own publicized vision of the world as divided into two camps, subliminal anticommunism breaking the surface to meld with counterterrorism as a cross-current rendering the first an ever-present menace: the Second Coming of the Cold War, in which evil is all-pervasive and to be unmercifully opposed and fought.

From that mind-set to the utter demonization of Putin is water sliding off a duck's back. The mills are churning out the propaganda, with hardly a dissenting voice in government or the media. Economic, always and eternal, but there is a perceptible shift in emphasis also taking place, the economic giving way to the IDEOLOGICAL for its own sake as a motivating factor. Yes, markets, etc., but Ukraine as the staging area for confrontation with Russia becomes a self-fulfilling purpose: not IMF on the march, but NATO on the march, right up to the Russian border, missile installations, troops, possible NATO-membership for Ukraine, the whole militaristic ball-of-wax. The "advantages" of pulling-hauling-tugging Ukraine westward, especially if by doing so this simultaneously unifies the West and compels Putin to respond, setting up draconian policies to weaken and isolate Russia—the professed objectives from the start—then much that Washington devoutly wished will have been achieved. Perhaps nuclear war would be too much, even as a pre-emptive strike, to want or bargain for, but since the days of Herman Kahn and contemplation of such things (all options are on the table) the psychopathological thinking of our political-military leadership remains constant, and alive and well.

This hatred and contempt for Russia has been an American disease since 1945. As Henry Wallace found out, recommending the policy of peaceful trade with the Soviet Union, as a means of easing Cold War tensions while also benefiting American business, was denounced as communistic and destroyed his career. There are no Henry Wallace's left; and instead, our barbarians at the gate (which in this case would be the Russian border), are screaming for blood. John McCain holds up the hand of a leading, proven fascist in Kiev. Obama, in true bipartisan fashion, cheers on Svoboda and Right Sector, their Nazi historical ties a plus, because their ultranationalism leaves no doubt on the country's rightward direction and antipathy to Russia. Fascism is riding high in Ukraine, and our support feeds into the neo-fascist status of our own country.

But even were this all, a combined market-and-power play, there conceivably might be counteractive forces at work, Ukraine becoming Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic through means of the long-term normalization of trade—but that is not what the US wants. Ukraine, in America's eyes, has the honor of being irrelevant in and of itself (except, again, for the imperialist triadic desideratum), for its real value lies in setting a precedent. If all succeeds by US-EU-IMF-NATO lights, Ukraine becomes the poster boy for globalized interventionism on behalf of market fundamentalism, itself continually being revised as the US ups the ante, now including, beyond raising privatization to a moral absolute, a whole range of counterrevolutionary policies, strategies, and enforcement-mechanisms designed to remove all restrictions on the unimpeded march of American global hegemony. Russia is the obvious candidate for power-reduction; that it no longer rests on socialist foundations means nothing. Here rigid ideological thinking is determining: how be sure Putin is not resurrecting Stalin, and besides, cannot it be said that Hitler (or his present Ukrainian surrogates) opposed Soviet communism? Neither Putin nor Russia can reverse deeply-entrenched fears long antedating the Cold War. Nevertheless, the US's appetite for hegemonic power and glory could still be appeased/satisfied if the global system were somewhat stationary,

circa 1945 and possibly later, when America had a commanding lead as acting unilaterally in world affairs.

That is no longer true. Here I suggest the primal or underlying significance of Ukraine, keeping constant its vista for America and Europe as an open-market area, and militarily, its positioning such that an array of forces could be placed adjacent to Russia, is creating the precedent, indeed, virtually as reproduction insofar as economic-military planning is concerned, for isolating, containing, and drastically reducing the power of, CHINA, America's real designated-enemy. For Obama, China supersedes Russia as obstruction number one in America's place in the great-chain-of- (capitalist) being. Failure in Ukraine is unthinkable; the Cold War purportedly is all about a test of wills, whom blinks first (!), and if the US is unable to stare down Russia, what chance does it have in the re-making, or at least neutralizing and ultimately crippling China? When I say, America's unilateral dominance in the world "is no longer true," this may in fact be the key to providing the background for US involvement with, and interest in, Ukraine.

In the international system, the movement from a unipolar to a multipolar structure of power has been, from America's perspective, traumatic, if not catastrophic—hence its inability, bordering on irrationality, of letting go of Cold War dogma. Whether the morbidity of obsessive behavior attracted to both capital accumulation without end and the manifestations of wealth and power energizing and legitimizing that drive, or the simple pursuit of realpolitik based on competing, expanding political economies, has been responsible for freezing into place the dedication to this dogma, its result has been the formulation and execution of policies internally repressive, externally aggressive. Being number one is, as if to say, the US demands respect consistent with its power, all challenges real and imagined to be met with force or suasion, in either case through war preparation and military supremacy. This attitude, toughness as a moral virtue, had been frozen into place instantly with the conclusion of World War II, and adequate to the needs of opposing Russia while also getting the jump on capitalist rivals for market penetration and lucrative foreign investment. In both endeavors, America appreciated the value of international solutions to ratifying its pre-eminence, from Bretton Woods through the IMF, WTO, and beyond.

However, history, despite all efforts at stabilization and counterrevolution, cannot be held back, the result being the rise of new power-centers, so that unilateral action was neither feasible or accepted, a world then where emerging nations industrialized to their own benefit, and looming as potential threats to America, we see foremost China, followed by the EU, India, Brazil, a never-ending procession of development, the formation of blocs, in sum, the growing decentralization of world power, to America, the worst thing that could possibly happen. It is in this context that we can view Ukraine, for in consecutive order, it is about the government on the ground, sufficiently fascist-tinctured to afford the abidance with IMF principles and potential NATO membership, at the same time occupying a forward position in the containment of Russia; next, Russia itself, minimally, the removal of Putin, but as far as the imagination can wander, up to and including a modified scorched-earth policy as pay-back for presumably Russian harm to America and world capitalism; and still, the American vision, once-for-all, taking on China, already put in motion through the delineation of military priorities directed to the task (the "pivot," shifting naval forces to the Pacific, along with joint-military exercises, encouragement of Japanese rearmament, and beefing up military alliances) in tandem with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, all designed to keep China somehow thwarted in the mistaken hope that it will crumble from its dead weight.

And where is Ukraine in this paradigm of global hegemony? The precedent of standing up to Russia, basically, the reason for US support for the coup, and prior subsidizing of opposition forces, has equal application to China, a golden rope of regime change to restore the world to its US-led innocence and splendor, this at the expense, perhaps before the face-off with China ever comes about, of a horrendous war that America, in its moral-spiritual vacuum, unconsciously wants. Better to have left Ukraine to its own devices, rather than stir the cauldron.

MARCH 18, 2014

### **America's Hegemonic Passion**

John McCain, bless his stout heart, has given us perhaps the best portrait of the American Mind since Crevecoeur and Tocqueville, an incipient fascism nibbling at the edges for, now, several centuries, even before fascism was a known quantity. He captures the genius of our Inner Dream: conquest pure and simple, the victim almost immaterial, just so long as there are victims—for that is the test of a manly nation, one whose actions, however destructive, the bloodier the better, under God, for He/She always recognizes those who do His/Her work on behalf of the advancement of private property (privatization the Golden Rule of social institutions) and keeping the inferior heathen (a flexible group, as more come to see the light, but presently, the Russians and Chinese) in their place, where they cannot harm or contaminate others.

It is true, God had a special place in His/Her heart for the Holy Land, but it is foolish to think that God doesn't keep up with current events, so that today His/Her real interest is, of course, Crimea, just outside of which the heathen are gathered for unjustified warfare, and therefore must be punished, nay, pushed back, nay, conquered and destroyed. Nothing less will do, except that having gained that Wisdom, His/Her peoples must not rest on their laurels. The struggle between Good and Evil goes on, with the good Senator (the David in our midst) leading us beyond Russia to China and points north-south-east-west, whatever obstructs America's presence in a divinely mandated and orchestrated global hegemony.

God is lucky to have such devoted servants, devout in their wholesome regard for humanity, as Obama, Kerry, the Clintons (Adam and Eve clothed in modern dress), and that secret order of priests in holy orders, the CIA, with their wannabes from NSA next in line in receipt of God's blessings. But enough. Action not talk is required. The Heavens shake with anticipation, perhaps a mushroom cloud to the very Empyrean. My New York Times Comment on John McCain's op. ed. article, "Obama Has Made America Look Weak," March 14 (mine, same date), follows:

Brecht's "Arturo Ui" did not say it better: "realism, strength, and leadership," precise code for the psychopathology of fascism. Today, NATO expansion, then Crimea back in the fold, then the toppling of Russia, then Iran and China, and, tomorrow—THE WORLD! Thanks, Senator, for this excellent summary of the American global vision—but one error, you have not included Obama and the Democrats therein, for they agree with you completely.

Do not be fooled by Obama's talk. It's for domestic consumption while he and his advisers (from Kerry to John Brennan) are with you 100%. You should respect a man who personally authorizes drone assassinations—a cred amply demonstrating his articulation of the American ethos. In fact, most of the country is solidly with you. Why be cry-babies? Why be ashamed

of strength and complete demonstration of credibility? In sum, why flinch at the prospect of nuclear war?

Only cowards and dirty Reds would object to eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with Putin, whom, as all know, is Stalin-Lenin-Trotsky resurrected from the grave. A menace, pure Evil. No, I couldn't agree more, that we must lead the world, unchallenged, to a better place, of genuine patriotism founded on market fundamentalism, privatization, and an army more potent than the rest of the world combined. Appropriations for war are the secret of keeping the peace. The social safety net coddles people at home, unfit for manhood. All power (and money) to the military!

MARCH 20, 2014

### **The Rise of Fascism in the West**

Fascism dribbles off the tongue too easily, yet it is possible to wrap one's arms around the concept and practice with, allowing for historical variations, some degree of precision. Hitler's Germany may be the gold standard by which to measure all else, but even there correction can be made for both underlying structural features and ideological themes applied to other and different settings. By that I mean, e.g., functional equivalents of Nazi societal organization, if you will, foundations or perhaps sub-foundations of the social order and political culture. If we return to Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, the now-neglected classic on the subject and Robert A. Brady's *Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, also near-forgotten, focused on the ideology of business organization, we can say that the primal factor in fascism's internal composition is capitalism, not your everyday Smithian variety happily ensconced in Econ. 101 textbooks, but the real thing at an advanced form of development: monopolization, greater cohesion through trade associations, neutralization of labor as a collective-bargaining social force, above all, an hierarchical class system with commanding decisions at the top then filtered down through gradations of rank, integrated with and complemented by the political-structural framework of business-government interpenetration.

This paradigm of centralized power embedded in the synthesis of corporatism and the State, the latter, itself the more powerful the better, in order to serve and protect the business system, its dominance over labor, its penetration of foreign markets, its further concentration through preventing internecine competition, is equally characteristic of 1930s Germany (already mostly evident under Weimar) and the US beginning in earnest still earlier but perhaps taking more protracted form. Diagrammatically, we are, circa 2014, more than superseding that German stage, our "cartels" disguised by other names, our rate of concentration the apogee of capitalist inner logic. From here it is readily apparent the appetitive and combative nature of capitalism, egged on or reinforced by the Statist dimension: America's version of globalization to a tee.

This underpinning, not the concentration camp or gas chamber, establishes the bedrock on which the fascist edifice rests, makes them possible, embodied in militaristic aggression in Germany, but, for the US, and as Barrington Moore pointed out, in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, for Japan as well, what is critical to fascism is not only business-government interpenetration (Masao Maruyama years ago termed this, for Japan, the "close-embrace" system), but also the regimentation of the people, glimpses of which appear in the NSA wholesale surveillance of the

public, and a prepackaged ideology of permanent-war readiness buttressed by a saturated climate of counterterrorism.

I think you get the picture. America is not all Innocence and Milk-and-Honey, the hegemonic demiurge in full throttle under Obama, now poised for the much anticipated (and, I believe, welcomed) conflict with Russia, having carefully arranged the chess board, the rooks, IMF and NATO, the queen, all-purpose privatization, the pawns, “friends and allies” persuaded to do America’s bidding, finally, the king, not the innocuous piece, nor here, a single individual, but Obama’s collective national-security advisors, taking in CIA, NSA, Pentagon officials, even then, the tip of the iceberg of war-making, war-striving apparatus, Washington up to its neck from every quarter, bipartisan all the way, in sharpening the killer instinct. Kerry and Biden are the cheerleaders for imperialism and, increasingly, militarism, for they, and Obama, recognize the two are inseparable, to which they seem especially dedicated. Ukraine has found its soul mates.

My New York Times Comments on the editorial, “Post-Crimea Relations With the West,” (March 19), and Peter Baker, “If Not a Cold War, a Return to a Chilly Rivalry,” same date, as are my Comments, follow:

## I

Truly marvelous. The Times joins the Cold War chorus with enthusiasm. Nowhere do I find mention that the NATO putsch/push eastward via the coup d’etat in Kiev inspired Putin’s action—missiles and bases right up to the Russian border. The events flesh out NATO’s meaning and significance. E.g., today’s Erlanger article, quoting Ian Bond, Ivo Daalder and others, makes clear that “collective defense” is code for the US-EU-IMF-NATO continued pressure for globalization according to the Washington Consensus. America and its “friends and allies” are willing to go to war for market fundamentalism, privatization, and, huge military outlays—the Alliance thrives on perpetuating tension. Nor do we see more than a passing reference to Ukrainian FASCISM, and that altogether dismissive.

Dr. Strangelove would be proud of The Times, saber-rattling through greater and greater military presence, emissaries of death like Joe Biden (Obama has found his willing lap dog!), a society, political culture, press, and other media, tired of the challenges of peace, thriving on confrontation, bruited manliness, toughness, credibility, as part of the New Decalogue—I honestly cannot see how nuclear war can be avoided: a colossal wish-fulfillment of a society and political economy deep-down mired in guilt, chauvinism, selfishness, wanting to end it all.

The Times takes joy in demonizing Putin. The West can do no wrong! When fascism becomes more transparent—perhaps minds will change.

## II

The “resets” were founded on convenience and hypocrisy, business as usual marking the continuation of the Cold War, Crimea not signifying a New Cold War. Stating that Russia is more isolated than ever, the “international community” regarding it as an aggressor and wanting its pariah-status, is Washington propaganda and whistling in the dark. We’ve heard little from Asia or Latin America, and even a submissive EU has mixed feelings about

following the US lead of confrontation, knowing that in fact there was a coup d'état (not merely Baker's "pro-Western street protests,"), that the US applauds Svoboda and Right Sector, and that the potential NATO incursion eastward means a provocative armed presence on the Russian border.

Do continue to defame Putin and ascribe 100% blame on Russia for deteriorating East-West relations. America eventually will have its global comeuppance as its interventions and imposition of IMF austerity cum privatization measures take hold and the world has had enough of its hegemonic drive and mindset. A "defense" budget the equal of the rest of the world, nuclear modernization, the Pacific-first strategy, paramilitary operations galore, often directed to regime change, use of the Espionage Act to silence whistleblowers, MASSIVE SURVEILLANCE at home, eavesdropping on foreign leaders, who's kidding whom about aggressive global behavior and respect for international law?

The Times will be complicit in nuclear annihilation, if it should come.

MARCH 21, 2014

### **Capitalism's Apocalypse/IMF Triumphalism**

Ukraine is a pain in the (world's) ass at the moment, except that we're used to creating subterfuges for expanding America's global hegemony. That has been a unifying tendency in US politics, a bipartisan foreign policy knowingly in support of dictatorships wholly compliant, solicitous of American interests. Near-unanimity on war and counterrevolution abroad, and its corollary, near-unanimous acceptance of capitalism at home (not just capitalism, but its specific hierarchical form of heavily skewed wealth-and-power distribution, monopolistic organization, deregulation, social-control mechanisms inhering in the ideological confluence of Exceptionalism, permanent war, and supposed classless Innocence) allows for seeming differences on domestic public policy and cultural issues. It's hard to hate a fellow Imperialist when disagreements arise over health care, voting rights, abortion, merely points of conflict wherein the parties jockey for space to see who can be more expansionist, aggressive, bloodthirsty in international politics and economics. We are all Americans (!) when it comes to massive surveillance, the morality and efficacy of targeted assassination, humongous military appropriations, with cultural issues such as gay rights welcome distractions by a bipartisan leadership from questioning the fundamental Authority of corporate-military elites buttressing US-inspired World Order.

Ukraine, presumably messy in sorting out from a geostrategic standpoint, is a blessing, not in disguise, but, for America, the next best thing to the Soviet break-up, now, hopefully, to be carried further via a direct entry to the Russian border. NATO leaders are salivating at the Crimean crisis for what it portends in bringing forces right to Russia's borders, troops, missiles, all—the idealized American paradigm of global outreach which NATO was intended to serve. "Friends and allies" is a wondrous phenomenon by which to mount interventions, somehow hiding the fulfillment of a US-guided reshaping of the global structure to ensure its ideological-military dominance, as itself a stabilizing context for its commercial-financial supremacy (industrialism, leave to others, so long as remaining a source of profits in foreign operations). In the case of Ukraine, the bridge to confrontation has been worth the pre-planning, the financial assistance to NGOs and fascist groups promising disruption in order for a temporary vacuum to be filled and therefore now making



possible, as part of the anti-Russian posture, the imposition of IMF ground-rules on a benighted country (probably an equally important objective in its own right), appears to have succeeded, at least in stirring up public opinion fueling a more explicit return to the Cold War.

Ukraine joins the ranks of Western tributaries, whether or not NATO membership follows; for it is doing its part in the envelopment of Eastern Europe within a US-sponsored framework to preserve the status of an American-Western European system of global hegemony threatened by its own atrophic condition and solipsistic dreams of grandeur. The world is changing; the US is clutching at straws, Ukraine being merely the latest one. It does not have to be this way. There is nothing deterministic about a formation's decline, for even capitalism, democratically-organized, still could have some good years to its reign. But this all-consuming militarism is, of course, tugging in the opposite direction. Scream defiance all one wants against Putin and Russia (and China, Brazil, and others standing in the background, as wanting and deserving recognition of the right to autonomous growth, however different from the Washington Consensus), but unless the US-EU power-center undergoes severe re-structuring, highly unlikely, or graciously conducts its own structural-political decline, equally unlikely, the world will see more Ukraines, more crises, more counterrevolution (ultimately, to no avail), and, as if governed by an irresistible death instinct—capitalism or die!—a somewhat bleak future.

My New York Times Comments, editorial, "Russia and the G-8," (March 20), and Steven Erlanger and Andrew Kramer's article, "Tempered Cheers in Ukraine for the Ex-Premier [Tymoshenko], Tied to Political Past," same date, as is my Comment, follows:

I

Superbly put: "the West to demonstrate common purpose....G-8 minus-1 meeting...can do a better job...against Mr. Putin's arrogance and contempt for international law." Such law=market fundamentalism, privatization, a coalition of capitalist powers collectively seeking global dominance, not satisfied until Russia and China (despite their own capitalist features) and emerging Latin American radicalism are contained, eliminated as rival power-centers, with the US orchestrating its own supremacy.

That the G-8 would include Italy and exclude China shows an Europe-centric (under US wings) power coalition, not economic oriented so much as a world military orientation with NATO, not Putin's Russia, gobbling up nations and territories. The Times laments European disarray, when in reality that reveals some remaining sanity in not breathlessly rushing toward global war.

Be careful whom and what you oppose. Your condescending remark that by the grace of capitalist hegemony Russia was even admitted into the UN Security Council shows a one-sided depiction of international order. Yes, roll back Russia with US-NATO forces on its border; yes, implicitly ratify Obama's Pacific-first strategy to isolate and weaken China. Verily, The Times is back to 1950, dancing on the edges of Apocalypse.

All for what? Markets, military supremacy, celebration of toughness and credibility—a dismal picture of the psychopathology of conquest, even capitalism less important than WAR for its own sake!

## II

For the likes of Tymoshenko, is it worth flirting with global conflagration. From this account, Ukraine is one holy mess, replete with its share of oligarchs, not to mention, beyond the Fatherland Party a full complement of Nazi-sympathizers, now in high office, and the widespread influence of Svoboda and Right Sector. In all of this, The Times, as in today's editorial, resembles the Hearst press of 1898, inciting to conflict—and still not, in reporting and editorials, admitting the fact of a COUP, and further, the extreme Rightist complexion of principal actors, whose anti-Semitism, among other signs of fascism, is well-documented.

Tymoshenko reminds me of Hillary, instead of a gas princess, with remarkable political adaptativeness, a war-toughness princess, also attuned to power (almost an end in itself), in both cases thoroughly at home in the company of oligarchs. Frankly, why permit Ukraine the pivotal role in US-EU-IMF-NATO geopolitical strategy in a face-off with Russia? The US has collaborated with enough disreputable leaders—Pinochet comes to mind—in furtherance of its global aspirations. Is there no way to break the pattern?

American Exceptionalism is since World War II cover and refuge for questionable figures knee-deep in the abrogation of the rule of law. Apparently, anything goes in the self-proclaimed guardianship of freedom in the world, Ukraine the updating of Nationalist China under Chiang Kai-shek, Cuba under Batista, etc. Hardly worth supporting.

MARCH 25, 2014

### **Russia, Knuckle Under—Or Else!**

Americans' self-delusion that a post-Cold War era has been suddenly closed because of Russia annexing Crimea, is incorrect for several reasons. Chiefly, the continuity has never been broken. Each supposed thaw in relations has provided gathering space for primarily US cumulative arms-building, global market-penetration, emphasis on creating a national-security state, with Russia not bathed in innocence yet also hands-down outclassed by America in every department: a broad swath of military intervention, efforts at and success in regime change (implemented through the breadth of paramilitary operations), size of military expenditures (even as measured against gross domestic product), and the degree of ideological conditioning in support of war and the doctrine of permanent war. We speak of Russian totalitarianism, but say nothing about the substratum of ideological mind-bending in the West and especially America conditioning their peoples to equating freedom and democracy with the institutions and practices of advanced capitalism—no other standard on offer (in America the democracy-capitalism equation and consequent narrowing of permissible ideological BOUNDARIES since inception).

Today "Putinism" has become the term of choice for insinuating the combined Hitler-Stalin image as the nemesis of America reaching deeply into the national psyche. Exceptionalism has become all-consuming triumphalism, dulling moral sensibility and demanding conformity—since 1945 a progressive tightening of boundaries already set in place, now adding to capitalist absolutism the vigorous antisocialism which generates increased ethnocentrism and xenophobia. A combination of industrial-commercial-financial might, especially following a world war that devastated Europe and Russia, established the terms from the beginning of America's claims to

global hegemony. Today, from the US perspective, that context of arrogance and superiority has not changed, which makes the emergence of a multipolar power system then and now unthinkable, Russia no matter its policies—whether or not in response to US actions—the implacable foe, a paranoid currently directed as well to China.

The “reset” in Cold War US-Russian relations was always a fraud, and in fact only broke surface with Reagan and mumbo jumbo about looking into the eyes of the adversary while pushing all levers to the hilt which might conceivably bring about Soviet dismemberment. Few American presidents before even bothered with the rhetoric of peace, declaring Russia instead an international outlaw as part of a world conspiracy. The idea struck and still strikes receptive ground. Consider the evidence presented by Peter Baker, in his article, “3 Presidents and a Riddle Named Putin,” *New York Times* (March 24), which, in his apparent enthusiasm for the anti-Russian position, consistent with that of his paper, has led to excellent detailed coverage of the flagrant animus. Passing lightly over Clinton and Bush, he writes that under Obama there has been a steady deterioration “to the point that relations between Russia and the United States are now at their worst point since the end of the Cold War.”

The fault lies with Putin, of course. Baker writes: “For 15 years, Vladimir V. Putin has confounded American presidents as they tried to figure him out, only to misjudge him time and again. He has defied their assumptions and rebuffed their efforts at friendship. He has argued with them, lectured them, misled them, accused them, kept them waiting, kept them guessing, betrayed them and felt betrayed by them.” Translated: his sin of commission, he has talked back, was not properly submissive to the august US leadership, nor overawed by the power it commanded; his sin of omission, he did not sanction US-NATO interventions, welcome IMF protocols on austerity, privatization, and trade, or demonstrate good citizenship in the international community in myriad expected ways, e.g., a self-imposed subordination as the penance for Stalinist practice reputedly still in effect and therefore requiring a wholesale purging of the past so as to embrace the full genius of market fundamentalism. Baker’s final item, that “[Putin] felt betrayed by them,” unquestionably has to do with the West’s broken promise, as the condition of German reintegration and resolution of East-West tensions, about NATO expansion eastward, the point currently highlighted in the Crimean crisis because of the Ukrainian corridor potentially opened, through the coup, to the Russian border. The feeling of betrayal here is not unreasonable, Poland and Lithuania already in militarized posture facing East and Kiev actively seeking a relationship with the EU that might lead to NATO membership.

In true-NYT fashion with respect to reporting on Russia (i.e., loading the dice), and one might add China, Cuba, and Venezuela, Baker writes that the three presidents sought “to forge a historic if elusive new relationship with Russia, only to find their efforts torpedoed by the wiry martial arts master and former K.G.B. colonel....And they underestimated his deep sense of grievance.” Putin the reproachful autocrat. Their national-security advisors “saw him [Putin] for what he was,” but had no choice in the attempt “to establish a better relationship.” Sotto voce, because he does nothing to follow up the point, Baker adds: “It may be that some of their policies hurt the chances of that by fueling Mr. Putin’s discontent, whether it was NATO expansion, the Iraq war or the Libya war, but in the end they said, they were dealing with a Russian leader fundamentally at odds with the West.” Ah, the West, the holy shrine of geopolitics, with liberty and justice for all—Putin ungracious to a fault by not buying into the mythology of international capitalism.

Russia should take its medicine, a declination to match American ascendancy, as in the remark of James Goldgeier, dean of international studies, American University: “The West has focused on the notion that Putin is a pragmatic realist who will cooperate with us whenever there are sufficient common interests. We let that belief overshadow his stated goal of revising a post-Cold War settlement in which Moscow lost control over significant territory and watched as the West expanded its domain.” What nerve of Putin, to want to reverse Russian loss, Western domain-expansion! Dennis Blair, Obama’s first director of national intelligence, says that dictators should be thought of like “domestic politicians of the other party, opponents who smile on occasion when it suits their purposes, and cooperate when it is to their advantage, but who are at heart trying to push the U.S. out of power, will kneecap the United States if they get the chance and will only go along if the U.S. has more power than they.” Power, the universal solvent of social justice.

Eric Edelman, Bush’s undersecretary of defense, warns that “U.S. presidents and Western leaders” tend “to see the sense of grievance as a background condition that could be modulated by consideration of Russian national interests.” Not so, and why respect their national interests in the first place? Give them an inch and they’ll take a mile (themes of Toughness and Credibility invariably defining the US mindset), for he adds: “In fact, those efforts have been invariably taken as weakness.” It only gets better with Mike Rogers, chair of House Intelligence, this on Meet the Press (March 23): “He [Putin] goes to bed at night thinking of Peter the Great and he wakes up thinking of Stalin. We need to understand who he is and what he wants. It may not fit with what we believe of the 21st century.” This political-ideological atmosphere (one can find similar views ad infinitum) gives to the demonization of Putin a plausibleness because left unchallenged, and because US-EU provocation is equally passed over.

Baker poses a final (loaded) question which leaves little room for other than continued confrontation: “Has Mr. Putin changed over the last 15 years and become unhinged in some way, or does he simply see the world in starkly different terms than the West does, terms that make it hard if not impossible to find common ground?” Perhaps two world views do exist in conflict. Does that necessarily make the US one preferable?

My New York Times Comment on Michael McFaul’s op.-ed. article, “Confronting Putin’s Russia,” (March 24) epitomizing the hostility toward Putin and Russia, follows, same date:

McFaul is the perfect voice of the Obama admin., even though now at the Hoover. He covets engagement (aka, market fundamentalism, or ISOLATION, take your pick via US-defined international law and order). Yes, Putin is tough, unrepentant, an adversary of the West (Baker’s related column has choice quotes of Americans reeking with hostility and innuendos of large-scale military conflict), unwilling to play dead to US hegemonic claims. Can we blame him? Frankly, I don’t.

McFaul speaks of the unprovoked war in Iraq as a p.r. liability. What of targeted assassination? Afghanistan? Pacific-first strategy, for containment on another front (China)? global paramilitary operations for regime change? at home, a massive surveillance program, which should satisfy McFaul’s definition of autocracy? Espionage Act prosecution of whistleblowers?

Putinism, as caricatured in the West, seems junior-grade compared with Obamaism. Why the Crimean incursion? Wasn’t there a coup in Ukraine? Did not significant involvement

come from self-proclaimed FASCIST forces? Did not the US support those forces? Is not the Alliance—US, EU, IMF, NATO— expressing aggressive design, the potential of moving forces and missiles to the Russian border and possible NATO membership for Ukraine?

McFaul of course is entitled to his view, echoed and re-echoed by The Times. But this reader sees the spirit of war, anger at denial of world supremacy, revanche at every step and demonizing Putin cover for dominance.

MARCH 27, 2014

### **Surveillance and the Erosion of Civil Liberties**

Obama has been reported to be recommending the end to NSA bulk data collection. Even if true (it isn't given the many loopholes in his proposal, especially keeping intact the FISA Court and Section 215 of the Patriot Act), it's a little late after five years of structural-ideological imposition on the body politic, in the name of counterterrorism, a paradigm of fascistic social management, soft-glove intimidation, pressures toward conformity, all in the service of—what? It is hard to discern the magnitude of change in America over the period since World War II, Obama merely the present capstone of long-term trends of business concentration, military aggrandizement, societal alienation and false consciousness. Yet amidst gradual development of global hegemonic claims, precisely because a bastardized liberalism holds sway as the obscurantist medium, we miss the qualitative leap now taking place, a massive Rightward shift which embraces both major parties countenancing and legitimating a permanent war economy and mentality.

We've seen this before, the decade 1945-55 of torrid anticommunism fueling the Cold War, where Democrats and Republicans were indistinguishable from each other in advocating for super-patriotism garnished with consumerism and hostility toward organized labor. That complexion of American life has never changed, merely so grafted onto the national identity as in time to seem unremarkable, but for it to take on cumulative force, which it has, requires steady reinforcement until, as now, a breakthrough occurs. America sits uncomfortably in a world of other Powers; it wants the limelight to itself, unilateral military prowess combined with global financial-commercial leadership. Obstacles to this self-declared credo of a New Manifest Destiny clearly must be run over; hegemony does not admit of gradations, but rather calls for an all-or-nothing attitude toward internal regimentation, external conquest. To soften the image of Behemoth-like conduct, the US extends its influence and power through multinational military organization (NATO, SEATO) and international monetary and banking institutions (notably, IMF), without surrendering an iota of control over them.

Here we are, then: a half-trillion dollar (and counting) “defense” budget, far-flung missile installations and military bases, naval power massing in the Pacific to confront China, modernization of the nuclear stockpile, CIA stations as so many fingers in the pie determining the rise and fall of nations' regimes, all synthesized, coordinated, pushing outward, movement for its own sake almost losing sight of capitalism as America's reason for being, as though militaristic grandeur trumped the political economy making it possible. In this context, surveillance comes with the territory, part and parcel of the psychopathology of domination, as natural today as the air we breathe. Government has to be doing something to show its value as a coercive instrument, lest Authority (no longer government alone as possessing an official stamp, but transferred over to a

combined ruling group which includes corporate and military elites) be questioned and the cohesion necessary to pursuing hegemonic goals weakened. Obama presides, in the case of NSA, over a self-fulfilling prophecy or bureaucratic nightmare; of course, spy on the people—how else ensure their accommodation to the status quo, their enlistment in the ranks of militarism, their absolute devotion to the System as a whole (Kafka would be proud of that capital “S”), their dedication to their own annulment as historical actors, accepting in its place the crumbs from the tables of wealth and the smile of their POTUS.

My New York Times Comment on Charlie Savage’s excellent article, “Obama to Call for End to N.S.A.’s Bulk Data Collection,” (March 25), mine, same date, follows:

Obama is the enemy of civil liberties. This latest skirmish is to give the appearance of respect for the rule of law; meanwhile little has changed. The National Security State is an affront to a freedom-loving people, which, because of their apathy and/or complicity, the American people no longer are. N.S.A. should never have been allowed; 215 of the Patriot Act is so odious, no wonder the lack of transparency of USG under Obama; the “surveillance court” is an euphemism for star-chamber proceeding, its very decisions and operations wrapped in secrecy, its judges appointed by Chief Justice Roberts, not known for dedication to the law.

Obama presides over a cesspool of lawlessness; cosmetics, esp. at this point, merely rub salt in the wound to the US Constitution. A POTUS who actively employs the Espionage Act against whistleblowers (presumably it is a high crime to reveal repression and abrogation of habeas corpus rights) and personally authorizes targeted assassination (participating in the selection of targets) is hardly to be trusted when it comes to the issue of massive domestic surveillance.

Let the citizenry sleep the sleep of indifference; in recent years the US has made significant advances in the formation, refinement, and execution of the Police State. Why be surprised? We blithely back fascists in Ukraine, support military dictatorships worldwide (Egypt the latest example), and use CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations to overthrow governments we don’t like.

MARCH 28, 2014

### **Massing for Global Confrontation**

This was the week to bring Europe and the US into a unitary mold of fighting trim. If Crimea had simply been offered to Russia as bait to be nibbled, then Russia hauled in, the result could not be better. As it is, the US structured the Crimean coup in anticipation of Putin’s necessary response, not, as in American practice, to show toughness and demonstrate credibility, but, admittedly more prosaic, to prevent the movement of NATO forces, via Ukraine, to the Russian border. US gamesmanship had for its purpose to reenergize the West and make it, according to Obama, more aware of its “responsibilities” in helping shoulder the burden to confront the Soviet Union (oops, Russia) with the drawing of another red line. Obama in Brussels, exhibiting a necromantic aura, yet one—all the more chilling—garbed with winning smile and glad hand, invites Europe into participation in America’s favorite ritual: the reaffirmation of war as a permanent foundation for the

expression of Exceptionalism. By implication, without an Enemy by which to differentiate one's own moral goodness, the ideological house of cards would collapse. War is the glue cementing the national character.

The walk-ons in this high drama, like Poland and Lithuania, must feign panic, enabling the US to send in fighter jets and missile systems in defense of freedom, while Germany, Britain, and France are asked to cough up more troops and appropriations to assist in the noble cause. Obama, Nobel Peace Prize as the credential validating statesmanship from which he has derived astonishing mileage (however much his vitiating its meaning), is on a mission to gather a Grand Alliance in opposition to Russia. His message to Europe is one of simple exhortation: Rearm, Stand Firm, Advance, Conquer, through sanctions if possible or more active means if necessary. Deny the use of force, whilst building prodigiously (embarrassing the EU and NATO to fall into line) from ground up its basic components, and hence creating the context for its potential use. Russia becomes the Goths of our time, entitled to no mercy—or even negotiations. Do I exaggerate?

The week began with excluding Russia from the Group of 8, so abrupt and categorical the change that by two days later, Group of 7 became a routine designation. The next day, Obama designated Russia “a regional power,” yet still pressed the EU and NATO to expand the latter's military capabilities. And with an appearance at Flanders Fields the day after, he conjured up the specter of mass deaths in World War One as somehow connected to Russia's actions one hundred years later in Crimea, given its tenuousness a linkage based on innuendo (his way of instilling fears), the propaganda technique of choice perfected in the campaign of counterterrorism. And by the close of the week, he was emphasizing two conflicting world views, invoking the Iron Curtain, expecting images of slavery to dance before our eyes, on one side, as meanwhile pristine democracy lies on the other—very much the unreconstructed Cold Warrior at every turn.

But beyond carefully drafted rhetoric, there is the reality of confrontation, Crimea, I strongly suspect, the pretext for the reincarnation of Dulles's rollback theory and practice, and even then, never forsaking the “pivot”—as though back to a two-directional war paradigm and orientation. Only now, Russia itself is receding from view, replaced in geopolitical thinking by China as Enemy # 1 (conceptually, fairly crude, an undisguised encirclement backed as well by the Trans-Pacific Partnership), the furor over Russia in Crimea a means of strengthening the US military even more, though resources will merely add to the Pacific-first strategy. These are indeed exciting times, America as the fusion of three closely integrated formations, all significantly accelerated by Obama and the Democrats: the National Security State, the Garrison State, and the Surveillance State, all structurally simpatico with the highest stage of wealth-concentration in American history, the distillation therefore of the militarization and financialization of US capitalism.

My *New York Times* comment on Michael Shear and Paul Baker's article, “Obama Renewing U.S. Commitment to NATO Alliance,” (March 27), which serves as an example of the week's reporting, follows, same date:

Wonderful NYT, Go for it, treat Obama as a distinguished world leader and a demigod, replete with Shear's “neutral language,” to wit: “Russian aggression,” “ways of reassuring Poland,” “intended to explain and honor Europe's role in the global democratic movement,” “threatens to undermine the rules that free nations have fought to establish,” etc. Never mind drone assassination, the invasions into Iraq and Afghanistan, global paramilitary efforts

toward regime change, the undisputed Nazi/fascist elements in Ukraine, who led the coup and have high places in the interim government; the move to place NATO forces on the Russian border. Never mind any of that. Just stick to your guns (bad pun) and fuel the American psychosis of permanent war.

Demonize Putin and Russia, otherwise Obama's rhetoric today about a US-NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe might sound shrill. Beat the drums, turn on the patriotism spigot. Even allow a source pushing the administration line anonymity despite widespread quotation. Was it Rhodes? Readers are entitled to know the identity of officials, those whom you permit to hide—consistent with Obama's despication of transparency.

NYT once stood for responsible journalism under A.O.S. and Scotty. Where are we now but in the slime of White House propaganda. If you present news coverage, get rid of emotionally-loaded descriptions and one-sided interpretation—that, or forfeit your place in the front-ranks of journalism.

APRIL 1, 2014

### **Anti-Russian Feeding Frenzy**

Putin does not play fairly. By remaining circumspect, low-keyed, initiating dialogue, he neither conforms to America's image and ground-rules of power politics nor provides the pretext, for that reason, of a US-EU-NATO military offensive at the risk of nuclear annihilation. (Yulia Tymoshenko of the Fatherland party, the Ilsa Koch—lampshades made from Jewish skins of World War II fame—who is the darling of American foreign policy in the upcoming Ukrainian presidential election, did call for that annihilation of Russia, although her reference may have been merely to main force US-NATO armies and, implicitly, referring to a "scorched earth policy," air power, a variant of "shock and awe" in Iraq or Nazi blitzkrieg of London.)

The US does not know how to handle Putin except to ratchet up hostility still further, threaten greater sanctions, boast of America's "toughness" and "credibility," meanwhile deriding his "weakness" for seeking discussions. From every quarter, the New York Times to Congress, from Oval Office to public opinion, America, to honor its "obligations," stand by its "friends and allies," and its—the newly vogueish term—"partners," is prepared, indeed, overjoyed at the opportunity presented, to use Crimea as pretext for enlarging still further its political-economic-military-ideological boundaries, aka, sphere of influence and self-defined framework of globalization.

Ukraine is manna from Cold War heaven, support of neo-Nazis, whether Fatherland party, Right Sector, Svoboda, or Steven Bendara admiration societies even to their Right (this is turning into a script for Zero Mostel's sequel to "The Producers," with a reprise of "Springtime for Hitler in Berchtesgaden," only now it's Kiev) constituting an if not wholly admired yet still welcomed ally in the struggle against Russia. Who says the Cold War has ended? Since World War II America has gravitated to any dictatorship, and made most of them possible, opposed to Russia, or, more frequently than not, opposed to democratization of their own country. But Ukraine is not Chile; it borders Russia, the manna—or spiritual nourishment—in this case having been materialized as missile systems, military bases, possibly air fields, God's divine gift in a holy war against the former Soviet Union and its Stalin look-alike.



If Kerry-Lavrov talks prove fruitful, Washington will be draped in black. The last thing wanted in the US Congress is peace, a sentiment so pervasive in America that one would not be surprised if church bells rang, not for the break out of peace but that of war. E.g., as Weisman and Joachim in their NYT article, “Congress Approves Aid of \$1 Billion for Ukraine,” bring out, the House, 399-19, and the Senate, 98-2, have near-identical bills, which Obama said he would sign, that in addition to the appropriation itself increases the sanctions, makes them mandatory, and removes the president’s discretionary powers, all to be rushed through for signature. In the words of Eric Cantor, House majority leader, a Republican, “This bill is a first step toward supporting the Ukrainians and our Central and Eastern European partners, and imposing truly significant costs on Moscow.”

In bipartisan synch, Robert Menendez, chair, Senate Foreign Relations, echoed the sentiment: first step; throw in Central and Eastern Europe; the ominous notion of significant costs. Ah back to the late 1940s: “the Senate [they write] will move to pass a House bill to authorize the broadcast of Western news programs into Ukraine and the region,” while the House reciprocates in true cooperative fashion by agreeing to “take up the Senate aid-and-sanctions bill in order to pass it by a voice vote on Friday.” Passed. The feeding frenzy goes on, the hurry—strike while the fire is hot (the propaganda build-up on Putin and Crimea).

But why the Grand Strategy vis-à-vis Russia in the first place? The CP reader will pardon me if I take a seemingly Marxian detour, in this case, compounded by the mileage: from Crimea and Ukraine to Oso, Washington State. Documentation on anti-Russian fervor surrounds us, just turn on the tv or read The Times. Presently in the news also is the tragedy of the Oso landslide, the victims buried in mud and debris, never having had a chance, much like collective entrapment in an avalanche which every climber feels. No, I don’t blame Obama, Kerry, Brennan, Clapper, McCain, Graham, Cantor, etc. etc., although each has a supporting role in the articulation of what has happened, less in Oso proper, than the context (one both ideological and military) making what has happened possible and understandable. The blame is shared by us all, and goes back to what we affectionately call, The Founding of the Republic.

I refer to the Property Right, reified, emblazoned on our collective foreheads and in our hearts, that which has divine blessing and provides the inspiration for living, as though making forcible entry into our consciousness and pressed indelibly as the moral standard on our conscience. That landslide was avoidable. Those deaths should be ascribed to negligent homicide. In the accounts one reads, blame is assigned to the victims for choosing to live in a dangerous geological area subject to slides, or else the legal explanation is sought by way of throwing up one’s hands at the difficulty—as in the title of James Schwartz’s article in The Times, “No Easy Way to Restrict Construction in Risky Areas,” (March 29)—of abridging the right of property, however manifested. Here the focus should be, not on the householders of Oso, but the logging companies cutting timber on the slope above—in full knowledge of the dangers to the people below, who became “entombed” (in the account of another writer) in the mud, timber, and debris. Oso is a national tragedy on the altar of private property.

The company cannot be denied. No corporation can be denied. The absolutism of property in American ideology here becomes the ideologization of Nature itself, to be possessed (the verb which characterizes rape, but more familiarly attaches to consumerism—perhaps a rape of the mind) within the fabric of law and meeting the approval of the public. These two points, Crimea and Oso, appear to be worlds apart, and yet the forces driving people to needlessly suffer through

the recklessness of capital are the SAME accounting for America's societal hysteria in its relationship to Russia—and truth be told, to China, Cuba, a host of nations which in our ingrained counterrevolutionary psychopathology appear to us menacing because they are not exactly like us, i.e., do not define “democracy” and “freedom” exactly as we do, or to our liking.

My New York Times Comment on Schwartz's article, same date, follows:

As a non-expert on geologic matters I looked in vain for the discussion of timber cutting above Oso, which definitely created the landslide conditions and horrific deaths that followed. That timber workers were among the searchers only added to the macabre scene. What is at stake here obviously is PROPERTY RIGHTS (in this case, I refer not to the Oso residents, but the logging companies, which, in any sane world, should never have been given the right to cut, knowing the potential consequences).

Oso is a tragic example, indeed a microcosm, of a property-crazy American civilization. Government regulation, tarnished to begin with, because sharing the animus to its own powers, and complicit with the violators it is supposed to regulate, is seen by practically all (bless libertarianism!) as a species of communism. America gets what it deserves: more Osos, more defiance against rational rules of human existence.

Why are the predators protected, the people wanting a quiet life, not? Why must property rights, which has led in America to the highest concentration of wealth and differentiation between rich and poor in its history, trump moral values—save, of course, that wealth itself is the highest moral value.

I grieve for the people of Oso, and for a nation that is blind to its own folly as well.

APRIL 16, 2014

### **Obama, Monopoly Capitalism, and Global Hegemony**

We've seen enough to know that the US is on track to push structural-ideological tyranny to a new level, not so much the reproduction of 20<sup>th</sup> century fascism (although that historical experience has created an indelible mark on the mindset of present-day geopolitical strategists in defining what might be possible in violating international law without thoroughly antagonizing the world community) as, instead, using a cloak of liberal humanitarianism to assert military power in pursuit of traditional imperialism. The same goals, different label.

America transcends the recent past, including its share in constructing a system of power politics, in favor of more ambitious unilateral dominance which takes advantage of the increasing cultural pluralism arising from the fragmentation of the commercial-financial order. Counterterrorism is the fig leaf for achieving greater wealth-concentration at home, aided by massive surveillance to induce social control of the population (informal boundaries on permissible dissent) for purposes of creating on the base of formal democracy a national-security state, and for achieving in the world, a predator state charged with the mission of resisting the societal democratization of emerging and industrial economies alike. Both are necessary, compliancy here and abroad, a tightly-woven structure of wealth and power, if US capitalism, penetrating every nook and cranny of the globe, followed—or sometimes preceded—by military intervention, bases, naval

power, hard-nosed diplomacy, paramilitary efforts at regime change, is to sustain acceptable rates of profits at acceptable levels of risk. American capitalist preeminence in a not-deviating capitalist world, firmly grounded in the dynamics of counterrevolution (the US as guardian of the global system) is at the crux of what others perceive as the Exceptionalist Nightmare or the divine right of hegemony.

The fig leaf of counterterrorism, which has supplanted anticommunism to the same end of habituating the American people to still more invidious extremes of wealth differentiation and resulting class power, is still, however, not sufficient for the stabilization of capitalism at this level of intense concentration; for needed as well is the popularization of Reaction and Repression. Obama is the man for the job. His race —thanks to liberal guilt and political correctness—alone saves him from critical scrutiny (neatly played out, as though making Reagan’s Teflon presidency amateurish by comparison), as he, like none before him, integrates capitalist, military, intelligence, and media resources, i.e., the communities represented by the elites of each, into a finely-honed authoritarian backdrop for manifesting and executing national power. And yet, liberals slobber at his feet, their moral bankruptcy and lack of political wisdom and will nowhere more evident.

The putsch has become outmoded; the bowdlerization of race and gender is a sufficient cause of false consciousness, of feel-good celebration of diversity, as the upper 0.1% tightened their hold on the levers of power. A black president? a woman president? What would Paul Robeson think—or Rosa Luxemburg! If a white president abused power, from Espionage Act prosecutions to the hit list of drone assassinations, in the way Obama has, one might hope to see street demonstrations—a hope perhaps futile given the decline of societal awareness already rife in the way war crimes, corporate giveaways, and the celebration of wealth pass unnoticed.

Time for an accounting, then, before it’s too late. From whence, though? It is important to recognize how much America has changed, since, say, the early 1950s. At least, then, anticommunism was met by (often painful and unsuccessful) resistance, for as repression mounted so also did the clarity of struggle and need to fight back. Taft-Hartley, Peekskill, legislation, events, large and small, the purging of “reds” from labor unions (and like UE, whole unions themselves)—a time to be alive, the very lies being met in response by forthright declarations of freedom.

Those who took the Fifth, and found themselves fired; those like Claude Pepper of Florida, who in the 1950 Senate race had been smeared by the Miami Herald with a faked composite showing him embracing Joe Stalin, and Pepper’s opponent, campaigning around the state hissing that his opponent’s sister was a—thespian. Even as late as 1956, I followed Adlai Stevenson for three days during the California Democratic primary, and while hardly a flaming radical, he had, as I recall, dead-tired, standing on the railroad tracks somewhere around San Jose, expressed a vision of social awareness seldom found since. With Kennedy, the fascistization of America had begun in earnest.

The process continues, now accelerated.

APRIL 21, 2014

## **Titillations of Nuclear War**

For America, the prospect of the structural-ideological constancy of war preparation and occasional conflagration is a delight, conviction, compulsion. For how else demonstrate hegemony? How else, by arrogating to itself guardianship—and chief beneficiary—of the world system, legitimate, affirm, and secure the fruits of Exceptionalism? Beginning in the late-19th century, with the fusion of capitalism and national power, already prefigured in domestic expansion and railroad development, the earlier phrase, “Manifest Destiny,” albeit hackneyed and contrived from day one self-serving a ruling-class-in-formation and conveying moralistic ethnocentric content, accurately described the grandiosity of public policy to follow (up to the present and no doubt future). The psychopathology of the winner-take-all mental set fulfilled by the militarization of US capitalism has, since the end of World War II, created a closed system in which anticommunism—now counterterrorism—becomes CODE for stifling alternatives to ascendant monopoly capital and the internal regimentation of political-social thought.

Whether war is an unquestioned good in its own right, for which all societal resources are pressed into service (including the inevitable shrinkage in scope and quality of the social safety net), or itself merely the mechanism for ensuring the intact foundations of an hierarchical social order based on the internal discipline of its people—no questions asked in the operations of the System, from its process of wealth-concentration to its economic denigration of working people, to, of course, the prohibitive costs in the maintenance of a War Machine—is a moot point, so close has war and its preparation been mixed into the national experience. For the broad sweep of contemporary history, there is no better introduction than Arno Mayer’s article, “The Ukraine Imbroglia and the Decline of the American Empire,” in the Apr. 18-20 issue of *CounterPunch*. This clear-headed, wise assessment of the direction the US is taking should rightfully concern every American because it captures the ideological bind in which the country finds itself due primarily to where its own hubristic power arc has brought it. I marked a single sentence going unerringly to the heart of the matter: “Though largely subliminal, the greater the sense and fear of imperial decay and decline, the greater the national hubris and arrogance of power which cuts across party lines.”

Beware the wounded Behemoth, far more dangerous than when in good health. More than ever, precisely because the global context of power relations is becoming transformed through the rise of a multipolar world, and hardly unrelated, America’s own overextension, taking military and paramilitary form, of protecting and enforcing its privileged position (exacerbating already present contradictions in the political-social organization of advanced capitalism, not the least being, in light of class structure, a proneness to underconsumption), systemic cracks are now painfully evident, driving policy to assume a dangerous, almost devil-may-care, character. Obama is riding the wave of a senescent if not crumbling system. Massive surveillance and drone assassination are marks of desperation (as well as criminal in intent). And at this moment, we have Ukraine, almost as though a predestined gathering place for the working out of global tendencies—the parties acting their expected parts.

Thanatos hangs over American society like a pall for all the wrongs it has committed. This, too, may be subliminal at first, but I differ with Mayer only in that the decay and decline he speaks of possesses clear recognition in policy circles (again bipartisan in nature and content). Bullies run scared when truly found out, raising the prospect of greater opposition or that hegemony comes

with unacceptable costs, such as the dangers of nuclear war. Here the devastation to human lives might give little pause, but, oh, the destruction to property, the very essence of the moral life, now that's another matter. Property uber alles! Yes, Thanatos: When the lifeblood of a nation is drained by pointless capitalist striving, let alone visions of global supremacy, what is there left but a colossal death wish. Practically everything about present-day America points to the murderous-and-suicidal syndrome, a gnawing destructiveness of self which has eaten away conscience and reason, and left an all-pervasive emptiness of soul to be filled by hatred and violence. How else intervention disguised as humanitarianism, accounting for the death of countless thousands? How else POTUS selecting targets from a hit list as candidates for assassination?

And how else stirring the bloody cauldron of confrontation with Russia? I refer to Peter Baker's article, "In Cold War Echo, Obama Strategy Writes Off Putin," New York Times, 4-20, because Baker, like David Sanger, appears specially privy to USG deliberations and as an authoritative voice of the paper's editorial policy. The article is chilling. Obama's nihilism (which The Times shares) with respect to dancing on the edge of mortal disaster is presented in the most prosaic terms: "Even as the crisis in Ukraine continues to defy easy resolution, President Obama and his national security team are looking beyond the immediate conflict to forge a new long-term approach to Russia that applies an updated version of the Cold War strategy of containment." US post-World War II redux, "to counter the Soviet Union and its global ambitions," as though America had none (!), Obama "is focused on isolating" Putin's Russia "by cutting off its economic and political ties to the outside world, limiting its expansionist ambitions in its own neighborhood and effectively making it a pariah state."

Baker and TheTimes regard this as a good thing (as Baker's loaded language and the editorial position reveal—e.g., editorial, "Mr. Putin's Power Play," 4-16), envisioning a post-Russia world of America's global hegemony. Even if "the current standoff over Crimea and eastern Ukraine" is resolved," Obama "will never have a constructive relationship with Mr. Putin, aides say." For the remainder of his term he will "try to minimize the disruption Mr. Putin can cause," (we, of course, create none, including the coup itself) and "preserve whatever marginal cooperation can be saved and otherwise ignore the master of the Kremlin...." "Master of the Kremlin" hardly conforms to the vaunted journalistic formula of, "all the news that's fit to print." Nor does Baker's selection of Russian "experts," who, as in the case of Ivo Daalder (whom I quoted in an earlier article), spew anti-Russian hatred and applaud administration hard-line policy. Here Daalder (now president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs): "If you just stand there, be confident and raise the cost gradually and increasingly to Russia," this may not solve the Crimean and Eastern Ukraine problems. "But it may solve your Russia problem." Weaken it, ignore it, skip over it, on the road to China, where the real action lies. Obama's Pacific-first strategy, the so-called "pivot," is, in fact, the power-context for understanding US Russian policy under Team Obama.

It is imperative to degrade and humiliate Russia—Obama's repeated statements about its weakness in connection with Crimea—to clear the decks (pardon the pun, but naval power, e.g., nuclear powered aircraft carriers, is integral to the pivot) for action in establishing a vast sphere of influence in the Pacific, head-off a planned Russia-China Eurasian Bloc, and do to China what he wants to do to Russia, that is, isolate it, weaken it, make it submissive to America's financial-commercial-military global leadership. Thus, Baker continues, to rub salt in Russia's wounds, the US wants to nominate John Tefft as ambassador to Moscow: "When the search began months ago,

administration officials were leery of sending Mr. Tefft because of concern that his experience in former Soviet republics [Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania] that have flouted Moscow's influence would irritate Russia. Now, officials said, there is no reluctance to offend the Kremlin." Obama's put-up-your-dukes foreign policy, as here, claims the intellectual parentage of George F. Kennan, "retrofitting" it "for a new age," which Baker uncritically passes on without taking the measure of Kennan's complexity. The account verges on never-never land when he writes, "The administration's priority is to hold together an international consensus against Russia, including China, its longtime supporter on the United Nations Security Council." Unfortunately for Obama, China is not Kiev.

I include three pertinent NYT Comments, one, on the editorial, "Mr. Putin's Power Play," 4-16, the second, on Baker's article, 4-20, both in response to what I see as TheTimes's utter capitulation to the reactionary forces of impending conflict, and the third, specifically on this less than admirable sell-out, David Herszenhorn, "Russia Is Quick to Bend Truth About Ukraine," 4-16:

## I

NYT's raucous voice in stimulating a New Cold War does its journalistic history a dishonor. No mention of US-Obama Eurasian policy already implemented through the Pacific-first strategy intended to weaken simultaneously both Russia and China. USG presently escalates its foreign policy well beyond Kennan—and perhaps even Dulles. Take off your blinders and study the evolution of containment, the progression of unilateralism, the American demand for unchallenged preeminence: political, economic, ideological, military.

I hope Lavrov rejects the Geneva meeting as the stacked deck that it is. Obama is gambling on destabilizing the global economy as well as risking further interventions (not to say, the main point: confrontation with Russia), all for the sake of keeping the US as a single-centered world system in face of global realities. Gnash your teeth, but Putin is emerging as the voice of sanity and responsibility, Obama, the pettifogging miscreant with a hand on the Bomb. I shudder at the way America is behaving under his rule.

## II

The policy of isolating Russia is more dangerous and far more stupid than what Geo. Kennan envisioned for containment. Obama's rigid anticommunism (the ideological salience of his whole foreign policy, even though communism is off the table) makes Reagan a statesman. Obama covets war. Shallow, irresponsible, a phony of the first water in domestic policy, the best one can say for him is a) his consistency in across-the-board furtherance of wealth-concentration and monopoly capital, and b) a misguided global hegemony, which Kennan recognized to be both impractical and deleterious of solid international relations, even among allies. Those surrounding him give meaning the clique of Neo-Cons.

I hope Russia reciprocates, drastically cutting natural gas supplies to the West, rejecting the new ambassador, and pushing ahead, WITH CHINA, the Eurasian trading bloc as an antidote to a US-centered global system. The idea that China would go along with Obama is sheer madness (what I meant by stupidity), for the reverse will happen. After decades of friction between Russia and China under Stalin and Mao, the US is forcing a true

rapprochement, and thereby creating precisely the multipolar world it has been America's endeavor to prevent. Obama and his team (from Biden and Rice to Brennan and Rhodes) will go down in history as miscreant in their one-sided definition of America's national interest. Conquest is easy, honoring the fruits of civilization less so.

### III

One-sided journalism, neglecting US long-term support for regime change in Ukraine and undoubted fascistic elements and influences among Kiev policy-makers. Heartbreaking that NYT stoops so low, in support of USG attempts at crippling Russia and breaking an impending Eurasian economic framework—all to ensure American unilateral global dominance. Demonizing Putin assuredly plays well in America, far less so in the world.

There will be blowback, including the much-feared Russia-China rapprochement which until recently had a history, under Stalin and Mao, of friction and conflict. Obama's Pacific-first strategy merely adds fuel to the fire of global tensions—perhaps the reason for the policy. Divide and conquer, at the expense of potential global conflagration!

Here Ukraine is America's testing ground for asserting geopolitical hegemony, and neither Russia nor China will obligingly lay down and play dead. At home, counterterrorism suffices as the mechanism for engineering consent to foreign policy, however interventionist, and massive surveillance by NSA further ensures the quelling of critical awareness. Post-Cold War America is possibly more totalitarian, under Obama, than we've witnessed in the last five decades. Ignoring coups, US deployment of military "assets" worldwide, CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations (likewise global), all part of the interpretive context affecting Ukraine, does a disservice to Times readers.

APRIL 23, 2014

### **Unstoppable Obama**

Imperialism ad nauseam: If the new name of the game is liberal humanitarianism, the obfuscation is intentional, here, the militarization of advanced-capitalist expansion in pursuit of traditional objectives, from financial-commercial penetration to industrial outsourcing, raw-materials extraction, investment outlets, and good old-fashioned establishment of spheres of influence in the context of international power politics.

One CP reader wisely cautioned me not to focus solely on Obama, who, in reality is the anthropomorphized tip of the iceberg—yet, for that, hardly blameless or inconsequential. Granted, he is the nominal head of an integrated power structure, there, in the first place, indeed, carefully groomed for the job, because he, in seemingly disarming fashion, serves so well both the needs of financial capital and the wider corporate system on one hand, the military and intelligence communities on the other, Obama therefore, whether as figurehead or puppet, or as decision-maker in his own right, performs a systemic role with objective consequences for all to see.

What Arno Mayer just referred to as "national hubris and arrogance of power," has met its primary exponent in Obama, who presides over a National Security State and national-security

council so enmeshed in the interstices of global conquest that it would be disservice to critical analysis—and perhaps humankind’s survival as well—to downgrade his significance.

The jinni is out of the bottle, now, not only serving those who summoned him, but also emerging in his own right, precisely because freedom to maneuver corresponds exactly to their needs and wishes. He adds to political-economic imperialism (e.g., in America, latter 19th century Open-Door policy) a ready willing to engage in the use of force—how many US presidents have sat down with their advisors poring over hit lists from which to personally select and authorize targeted assassination?—and the expansion of military and paramilitary operations on a vast scale for purposes of intervention and regime change, a consistency of purpose dedicated to unilateral-sponsored global architecture with the US as the pinnacle of power on all things, soup to nuts, in satisfying a counterrevolutionary vision of ideological supremacy.

This provides context for Obama’s one-week trip beginning today (Apr. 22) to Asia in implementation of his infamous Pacific-first strategy. Yes, let’s give credit where credit is due; Obama has rescued from its dormant position in the bowels of the State Department the legacy of China-firsters of the late 1940s-early ‘50s, like Sen. Knowland, bound hand-and-foot to the China Lobby, in support of an Asian policy following World War II, essentially to prevent the rise of Communist China, facilitate the backdoor bombing (when the time was ripe) of the Soviet Union, and restore French colonialism to Indochina—a geopolitical framework which, with suitable adjustments, resembles that of the present. Only now, two things: a) the framework takes on urgency given the changing character of the global system, multipolar in direct challenge to America’s supremacy, which perceives itself threatened, even thwarted, in its megalomaniac ambitions toward world dominance (a valid perception, for the US is declining in all but its military capacity—itsself testimony to the more fundamental decline), and b) the framework has been conceptualized and already put into practice in broader terms.

The sky’s (no, the heaven’s) the limit—why not militarize the whole of Asia surrounding, enclosing, and, of course, ISOLATING China, just as current strategy seeks to achieve with respect to Russia. Here the Philippines and Ukraine become if not dialectically entwined then at least functional equivalents: Day one, stop in Manila, to shore up a military alliance and arrange for a sizable US military presence, while Biden, in Kiev, same day, wants to assure Ukraine of America’s steadfast protection—and throw in some nonlethal (?) further assistance as proof of our devotion. Then Obama is on to greener pastures, South Korea and Japan, delicately getting the latter to betray its postwar promises and resume its militaristic culture and ways. So many elements are intended to fall into place on the visit, a US-dominated semi-global sphere of influence to do for China what is already in the works for Russia: threaten, menace, surround the two, perhaps above all, somehow break down the growing Sino-Russian cooperation qua informal mutual security pact after decades in their contentious relations, now in realization through the Eurasian trading bloc.

Details of the visit and thoughts informing it are engrossing. The excellent article (its quality due to the privileged nature of the reporters’ access to Washington sources because their paper, the New York Times, is becoming increasingly trusted to serve as a White House propaganda organ—hence, excellence in accuracy from the horse’s mouth where the Obama people see no wrong in what they are doing, and are actually proud of this March Toward Confrontation), David Sanger and Mark Landler’s, “Obama’s Strategic Shift to Asia Is Hobbled by Pressure at Home and Crises Abroad,” (Apr. 22), is almost cavalier in describing the proto-war policy and framework, as in the brief



opening paragraph: “President Obama is expected to announce an agreement with the Philippines next Monday that would give American ships and planes the most extensive access to bases there since the United States relinquished its vast naval installation at Subic Bay in 1992.” (Would that this also serve as precedent for NATO forces in Ukraine!) This “centerpiece” of Obama’s trip—and one blushes at the reporters’ own modesty—“is a modest step to reassert America’s military presence in Asia.” A mere bagatelle, which “could nonetheless antagonize China,” they dimly realize, yet worth the candle, in which Obama rises to the occasion: For him, “it is the latest example of the deepening complexities of his efforts to shore up the strategic shift to Asia he announced three years ago and has struggled to maintain because of political pressures at home and a cascade of crises elsewhere in the world.”

Perhaps a mistrustful Congress takes liberal humanitarianism at face value (it is difficult to see how) but if Obama got off the rhetorical tightrope and revealed the full majesty of his strategy, a power sweep of Asia to humble China, prevent its effective coalition with Russia, and—to boot—make all of Asia a free-market zone, political pressures at home would crumble, except for those poor misguided souls who see militarism and war as destructive of civil liberties and social welfare. As for the “cascade of crises” in the world, they of course are integrally related to what the US is doing anywhere else in the world: a unitary hegemonic policy of counterrevolutionary intent and proportions in which, e.g., what happens in, say, Ukraine, has obvious ramifications for Russia, in turn, bearing on the attitudes and policies of China, and with snowball-effect opening eyes in Latin America, Africa, and Asia to US global designs. Not even the 1950s and the height of the Cold War created such a tinderbox of interdependent circumstances which Obama blithely dances over while the nation remains in stuporous denial.

The reporters treat “China’s narrative that his [Obama’s] real motive is to contain its rise,” as irrational, when in reality, he and everybody around him are screaming to the rooftops that that is the purpose of the Pacific-first strategy. The truth is so ugly that we feel that being open about it somehow renders it invisible and masks its aggressive intent. The term “narrative” is used to suggest a deliberate Chinese fabrication, as though shoring up alliances, conducting joint-exercises and naval maneuvers, and creating via the TransPacific Partnership, an inclusive market area at China’s expense, all for starters, as nuclear carriers speed thenceforward from the European and Middle East theaters, all have no bearing on the conscious encirclement of China and reduction of its power. All is made right, and presumably non-hostile, through bringing the blessings of—consumerism: “The premise of Mr. Obama’s strategy—that American power must follow its economic interests in a region where a growing middle class yearns for everything from iPhones to the new Ford Mustang—still makes sense, his advisers say.” Pshaw. Even Obama has more in mind than marketing iPhones. The literal containment of China has a certain frisson about it which carries beyond narrow capitalist objectives. Why not the whole world, sucked into the vortex of American ideology, from which business would greatly profit and the military hold down the lid, an expansive liberalism requiring here that the US honor its commitments to friends and allies in the region, as, e.g., “Much like the 2011 agreement to deploy Marines to Darwin, Australia [on Obama’s, not Bush’s, watch], such a presence [now, the Philippines] would theoretically give America more capacity to help its allies in territorial disputes with the Chinese.”

Theoretically, and practically. The US is interested in results, the Scarborough Shoal a micro-Crimea in keeping alive tensions and generating war-feelings. But more, stirring the pot of conflict,

as when, the reporters write, the Chinese response to American moves (much like the way Obama has characterized Russia's Ukraine position as founded on weakness) "is most likely bluster; the Chinese have shown no desire for confrontation." Ordinarily, that should be reassuring, a confirmation that America's supposed enemies operate from weakness (code for cowardice, ascribed to any who advocate for peace), but they put a negative spin even on that: "But the administration officials and some outside experts say the Chinese may be calculating that the United States does not have the wherewithal to change its focus, particularly as it wrestles with new threats in Eastern Europe." The lesson, get that wherewithal, as the numerous "experts" they quote strongly urge. On to the Pacific! Not least in value, the article helps us to see the role of think tanks in applauding and egging on American militarism. "Leverage" to counter China, is the operative word. For Sanger and Landler, defense guarantees with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines is not enough: "While Washington is obliged to defend all three against attack, the treaties say nothing about a clash over disputed territory, like the Scarborough Shoal, a fishing ground now occupied by Chinese vessels."

By all means, the drumbeats of war, courtesy The Times's drum and bugle corps, led down Broadway by Obama, followed by a display of the latest nuclear-tipped missiles, and for comic relief, clowns (Brennan and Rhodes will do) astride Predator Drones, miscellaneous camp-followers bringing up the rear, an intermixture of private and public, drawn from DOJ, SEC, FDA, FBI, CIA, and, their mirror image, Goldman, Morgan, B of A, Big Pharma, assorted hedge funds—I think we all get the picture, Americans, and hence patriots, to the core.

APRIL 28, 2014

### **US Military Globalization**

History, at the least, is process, interrelations, multilayered, marked by continuities of social structure, wealth distribution, all in all, embedded in a framework of causation even when serendipitous outcomes pop up, none of which is to suggest a rigid deterministic pattern, but only that in the case of Obama, one can readily credit America's protofascistic leanings over decades if not also centuries (war, intervention, racism, monopoly capital brought to a convergence), yet, despite prior historical trends, demand that he be held accountable for what occurs on his watch. Therefore, no free pass for overwhelming militarism, massive surveillance, policies favoring deregulation and wealth-concentration, contemptuous disregard for civil liberties and government transparency, and now, a foreign policy of exclusive global hegemony quite possibly surpassing that of his illustrious predecessors. What, in this context, is more criminal, the policies themselves, such as targeted assassination, regime change, a string of interventions—and the counterrevolutionary posture undergirding them, or, a nation and people, sharing complicity in their actuation and implementation, and more particularly, a morally bankrupt liberalism actively promoting them, with presumed radicals standing by in silence? Americans are implicated in deceit and denial, purchasing their comforts and self-righteousness at the expense of the collective human privation their military and paramilitary forces, their CIA operatives and private contractors, their support of repressive regimes and death squads have brought to much of the world's population.

Obama is at it again, his Asian journey of cementing a Grand Alliance designed to encircle (this only a first approximation to a broader geopolitical strategy) and thereby contain, hem-in, perforce

isolating and reducing the power of, China, intentionally builds political-ideological tensions of confrontation and perhaps ultimate war for a vast region, a result America welcomes if, by that, short of nuclear war, China and North Korea can be taught a lesson in good international citizenship according to US guidance, IMF instruction, free-market imperialism (aka liberal humanitarianism). Shockingly (at least to me) it appears that Herman Kahn and Rand Corporation war-games analysts—forerunner of today's Neo-Cons, some of whom actually came up through that arch-Cold War intellectual culture—have been reborn, their ideas now in vogue, because in fact Obama and his Shadow Cabinet of assorted war hawks/vultures regard Asia as a practical free-fire zone, come what may, for demonstrating the truth of American principles. “Better dead than red,” chanted and believed sixty-odd years ago, should be inscribed on a banner over the Situation Room, itself, right off of where the national-security advisers prepare the “hit lists” Obama studies as he personally authorizes assassination.

Asia and nuclear holocaust seem to go together in American policy-making circles (and have for a long time), without flinching at the potential outcome. In Japan, Obama's rapport with PM Abe marks a good start to activating the forces of extreme nationalism and militarism in the region, knocking heads together (Japan-South Korea) for the sake of a united front whose repercussions go beyond anti-Chinese maneuvering, encouraging political fragmentation with America conveniently filling the vacuum and creating a sphere of influence pointing outward to exerting pressures on India and Russia for accepting American leadership in all respects, a magnification of US power (with both Africa and Europe in the ultimate cross-hairs). The US no longer presents itself in the persona of a General LeMay, who would bomb the Commies and Ruskies “back to the Stone Age,” and instead, a more professionalized military, routinely on the think-tank and media circuits, nevertheless which more tactfully believes in, and awaits the opportunity for, the same thing. The theoretical separation between civilian and military control has all but vanished in terms of communication and community of interest, Obama descending Air Force One akin to Napoleon dismounting his spirited steed, all pomp and dashing display, a POTUS who would be king—or emperor, if given the chance.

New York Times reporters Mark Landler and Jodi Rudoren, in their article, “Obama Suffers Setbacks in Japan and the Mideast,” (Apr. 25), describe the first leg of Obama's Asian trip as part of a unified effort of the administration to shore up American power in regions in which it appears to need strengthening. Actually, they focus on the wrong things, “setbacks to two of his most cherished foreign-policy projects” (for Japan, a trade deal opening “its markets in rice, beef, poultry and pork,” for Israel, continued peace negotiations, broken off by Netanyahu when the PLO and Hamas joined together). The wrong things, because the trade deal was always secondary to the re-militarization of Japan, and peace negotiations were never wanted by Israel or the US, except on terms deeply unjust to the Palestinians. In effect, Obama had come out way ahead, the Shinzo-Barack show playing well to Japanese militarists, who, we know from one account out of the Foreign Ministry that revealed American pressures to discard the provisions of the Japanese constitution dealing with disarmament, felt for some time immensely reassured of the US's protective arm, now reinforced by Obama's pledge on the disputed islands in the East China Sea, as when Abe said, “On this point, I fully trust President Obama.”

This from a strident Rightist of the first water. In Israel, the result was equally predictable. Kerry's shuttle-diplomacy was already solidly inclined toward Israel, and with associates like

Indyck and Ross, the pretext of finding Hamas's presence a deal-breaker came right in time for an outcome certain from the start. Again, Obama a winner, the only losers being the dispossessed and the victims of force, a neat geostrategic package of mounting spheres of influence in different parts of the world, both heartlands for preventing the rise of alternative power-centers in what was already becoming a multipolar world system. That is hard for America to take; it cannot live with global democratization, allowing Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, to find their own way, not to say Brazil and India, coming increasingly into view, and, above all, the twin colossi, China and Russia, whose very existence is perceived as an ideological threat.

Counterterrorism throws a blanket over all policy matters disclosing global hegemony as America's modus operandi in conserving monopoly capital for its own world supremacy, but also as a system to be preserved in its own right, free from the threats of socialism and even more decisive intracapitalist rivalries. Russia and China can no longer claim a predominant socialist foundation and value system, yet even as their political-economic transformations proceed, that would not be acceptable to an America whose power structure remains wedded to US capitalist interests and the military edifice supporting it. Capitalism as an authentic international system breaks down under the competitive drive for markets, investments, and raw materials. America's variant of capitalism, more than any other, is characterized in its internal organization, currently, by processes of financialization and militarization, a systemic "advancement" to a higher stage having a mixed blessing because thus intensifying already existing rivalries.

One corrective to the Times's article, beyond mistaking Obama's intentions with respect to Israel and his presumed diplomatic defeat on the peace process because of the introduction of Hamas, is that Israel does not, in the administration's eyes, deserve equal billing with Japan, the Far East, and the Pacific-first strategy. Yes, the Middle East, which America is enabled to penetrate and establish a power-position by means of categorically supporting Israel, qualifies as an obviously significant sphere of influence, in light of the geopolitics of oil especially, but it must stand down now in relation to Ukraine, the reemergence of a European co-pivot to that of Asia—hence the military globalization—because perhaps for the first time the practical basis is laid for the simultaneous containment and isolation of both Russia and China, the achievement over each having reciprocal positive effect on achieving the other.

Obama did not come to Japan to eat high-priced sushi, to South Korea, to commiserate with the families over the ferry-boat tragedy, to Malaysia, the airplane tragedy, all of which were on his itinerary, but to talk military alliance, unification of forces, confrontation, a pep-rally, sweetened by the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to create, if I may, the Bamboo Curtain, in homage to its antecedent Iron Curtain in Europe, reinforced by army/marine bases, a Naval Armada, strategic bomber groups, joint maneuvers, so that no cracks in the bamboo occur. In South Korea, he found a ready roster not only for blasting the North, but for making clear—at South Korea's request—that American forces would not "abandon" its ally, keeping beyond the 2015 date firm command over that country's forces. At this writing, the Philippines await, no surprises there in the replenishment and expansion of the installation at Subic Bay.

Meanwhile, there is Russia to contend with, in the contingency war-planning throughout Obama's first and now second term, viscerally, as a hangover from earlier days, attracting the national-security staff and military establishment, not to say Congress, in still greater crusading mode than is felt about China. Americans have been conditioned to hate Putin and Russia, allowing

for greater latitude in taking military action on that front, than on Obama's opening a Second Front in Asia. "Assets" are flowing to the Pacific, partly because Obama and his think-tank, intelligence-community apparatchiki see dominance of a great land mass, while accomplishing the decapitation of China and, via the backdoor, Russia, as our future glory and destiny, but that does not alter the constant pressure to be applied to Russia through EU and NATO support. Can anything good possibly come out of this, or only the miasmic fantasies of a decaying Superpower intent on bringing the world down with it?

My New York Times Comment on the Landler-Rudoren article, same date, follows (emphasis here on NYT itself for complicity in furthering Obama's war objectives):

NYT's hero-worship posture toward Obama is crass prostration before Authority, unworthy of journalistic integrity. E.g.: "The setbacks...speak to the common challenge Mr. Obama has had in translating his ideas and ambitions into enduring policies. He has watched outside forces unravel his best-laid plans, from resetting relations with Russia to managing the epochal political change in the Arab world." Enduring policies? Even drone assassination is carefully structured to bind subsequent administrations. As for resetting relations with Russia, the reverse—here not only the coup in Ukraine—is true, steady US efforts at isolating Russia, banking on generating hostility in order to gain popularity at home; and urging NATO forces to the Russian border.

Indeed any discussion of Russia must include China, Obama's attempt to prevent their cooperation in a Eurasian bloc. Global hegemony is the "enduring" policy, that which NYT is afraid to discuss and analyze. Why the Far East trip? Why embrace Abe? Trade is one aspect, as in the TransPacific Partnership, but it is ancillary to the MILITARY purpose, and NYT knows that full well—i.e., the isolation and containment of China.

Worthy of hero-worship? Only if one wants the progression toward confrontation and possible war. As for the Middle East, obvious tilting to Israel and prevention of peace process; also, this week more attack copters to Sissi and Egyptian military government. Obama loves coups—helps create them.

MAY 1, 2014

### **Sanctions, the Financial Equivalent of War**

Apologies to William James for paraphrasing his famous dictum; and apologies to the world for a combined financial-corporate-military structure of power begging to display its macho capitalism at whatever cost. The ludicrous scene of Obama criticized from the Right as not sufficiently combative toward Russia and Putin, when Obama himself already occupies a position to the Right in the vicinity of Attila the Hun, shows us how far the American political-ideological extant universe has fallen off the spectrum of meaningful democracy and is knocking at the door of utter fascism.

Empty mouthings? Hardly, when one considers the unitary character of US domestic and foreign policy. But why recite all the barbarisms, sell-outs, harm done in fast creating an American underclass simultaneous with, and conjoined to, the aggressive geostrategic design of crippling

Russia and China both, and preventing their common action to build an Eurasian bloc to offset American world unilateral supremacy? I wish it were possible to trade Jeremiah for Rosa Luxemburg, but I'm afraid neither would get very far in today's world.

Let me, then, focus on one comparatively symptomatic, rather than causal, element brought to the foreground the last few days, a preliminary move in Obama's deliberate confrontation with Russia. Years ago I wrote, if there had not been a Vietnam War, we would have had to invent it. Ukraine fits the same global dynamics; if not occurring (won't you come into my web, said the spider to the fly), the US surely would have had to invent it—indeed, ANYTHING in order to apply pressure in reducing Russia's power in the world (along with Obama's visceral hatred of Putin as a sidelight), even that, as preparatory to doing battle with the ultimate enemy in Washington thinking, China itself. If America can put its stamp on all of Asia, the battle is won—the elimination of all foreseeable challenges to a dominance freely intermixing capitalism and militarism, truly qualifying as Exceptionalism in historical annals, because giving fascism a liberal face.

Sanctions are the lawyerly way to ensure destructiveness, an attempt to bring a people to its knees so that its government, in turn, will follow. Beats “shock and awe” when the other side can effectively respond militarily, even if not satisfying the shock troops of Reaction of the country administering the pressure—and thereby making POTUS seem moderate and a deserving Nobel. Thus far, Europe seems to be holding back, however, in turning the screws, a condition bound to change either way: US unilateralism shining forth, Europe itself relegated to the sidelines, or, America's preference, creating sufficient atmospherics and provocations to give Europe no other choice but to enlist in US dominance. (We call that NATO, with prospects of moving to the Russian border conveying a sense of participation in the grand enterprise.)

At the time of writing (Apr. 30), it's been only three days since the latest offensive began, appropriately and significantly at the time of Obama's Far Eastern trip; for the broader policy is to treat Russia and China as inseparable, the twin Villains upsetting world order, to which all right-thinking (excuse the pun) nations should and must offer resistance. The New York Times is a useful source for outlining the events (its own reporters providing the material the editorial board then transmogrifies to suit its purposes). Of course, the policy and its rationale have been in the works for some time, the steps, here, beginning with Putin's demonization, going back a ways and part of the ideological context seen more recently in the conversion of anticommunism to counterterrorism—without losing sight of the former buried still in its mental set—and the whole idea of sanctions as a weapon in the Cold War dating back to Kennedy and Cuba. The object has been and remains to make the people suffer. And if Kennedy be our guide, what does this say about liberalism (a condition that has not changed)? Suffering can be made to appear good, statesmanlike, because falling short of thermonuclear disaster. How nice, protract the death of the people, rather than kill them instantly.

Peter Baker, writing “Sanctions Revive Search for Secret Putin Fortune,” (Apr. 27), is beautiful innuendo, drive a wedge between Russia and its people, or, that failing, speculate on his shadiness as a leader, the next round of sanctions against his friends to smoke him out rather than, for now, attack him directly. A Bush counterterrorism adviser, Juan Zarate, put it like this: “It's something that could be done that would send a very clear signal of taking the gloves off and not just dance around it.” The whole project is like regime change via incremental steps, and, as follow-up, identifying Putin and Russia as one, thus discrediting Russia as a threat to world peace.

The same day Baker and C.J. Chivers, writing “U.S. Weighs Harder Line on Russia Than European Allies,” (Apr. 27), address the thorny issue of how far to approach sanctions against Russia alone, conversely, “how much emphasis to put on unity with European allies more reluctant to take stronger economic actions against Moscow.” The issue itself highlights the military factor, because sanctions assumes the military follow-up, the outdistancing of Europe here threatening to forestall NATO direct involvement through moving troops and war goods to the Russian border to give sanctions a further edge. Unity is imperative, not only to mobilize force, but also to make the US appear hidden in the crowd, cementing “friends and allies”—the overworked Pentagon/State designation—which provides deniability to the primarily US geopolitical agenda. Cynicism, as well as tension over the right path, can be seen in their description that, rather than waiting for “an undivided front” to take form, “some inside and outside the administration argue that the United States should act unilaterally if necessary, on the assumption that the Europeans will ultimately follow.”

But whether in concert or acting alone, sanctions are not questioned nor is the military factor in giving weight to the policy, the US being determined on confrontation with or without “friends and allies.” It is somewhat ironic that American business, in its quest for global profits and, relatedly, sustained domestic performance and favorable profit rates, should be the ones to urge USG restraint. Baker and Chivers write: “During internal deliberations, Jacob J. Lew, the secretary of the Treasury, and other officials have argued for caution, maintaining that, while action is needed, more expansive measures without European support might hurt American business interests without having the desired impact on Russia, according to people informed about the discussion.” Obama, while still traveling in Asia, stated, using armed sales to Russia (yes, the US was filling military contracts with Russia!) as an example, that if America cut off these sales, “every European defense contractor” would backfill the orders, thereby a policy “not very effective.”

Not surprisingly, Obama’s camp-followers (I use the term advisedly, some of his advisers, like David J. Kramer, head of the CIA-front organization, Freedom House, here) want unilateralism, holding that the US “should move ahead with more decisive action on the theory that Europe wants leadership from Washington and historically joins in eventually.” Kramer: “While imposing sanctions together with the E.U. would be nice, the U.S. simply has to lead and not waste more time trying to present a united approach. It is easier to do so than it is for the Europeans, and they will follow, as long as we lead.”

Kramer is merely a member of the war chorus; Washington seems primed for the Obama Requiem, a hostage crisis of European observers ready for use as pretext for more get-tough sanctions. Predictably, Obama, stopping in Manila to sign a long-term military pact, keeps up the propaganda momentum on further sanctions. Mark Landler and Baker, “Obama Says More Sanctions Against Russia Are Coming,” (Apr. 28), quote POTUS, “These sanctions represent the next stage in a calibrated effort to change Russia’s behavior.” And since “[w]e don’t yet know whether it is going to work,” Obama’s “calibrated effort” provides the green light for breaking the will to resist, the collective torture rack, of Inquisition-fame, coming vividly to mind (symbolically only, of course).

That he was in the Philippines to negotiate a ten-year agreement “that would give American warships and planes extended access to bases there,” at the same time that he was chastising Putin and Russia, brilliantly illuminates the larger picture: China and Russia as objects of isolation,

containment, and a downward power trajectory. Obama to Aquino: “This is going to be a terrific opportunity for us to work with the Philippines, to make sure our navies, our air forces are coordinating.” Obama proves himself an effective multitasker: Russia and China kept separate, the better to move on each front, yet for geostrategic purposes, a blurring of lines, militarily conceptualized as a political-ideological-structural impediment to America’s global hegemony.

And today’s editorial, “Not Getting Through to Mr. Putin,” plays catch-up with tendencies building well before the Ukrainian crisis and US-EU maneuverings into confrontation with Russia. More sanctions followed earlier this week. NYT, if I may use the term, crows at their effects on the Russian economy, including, “[o]n Friday, citing the capital flight, Standard & Poor’s cut Russia’s credit rating to a notch above junk.” The Times wants more, for the newly-announced “targeted penalties are not likely to change Russia’s behavior.” Unfortunately, “the sort that would—coordinated United States-European Union sanctions on financial institutions, the energy sector or defense industries—have proved very difficult to construct, largely because of the substantial differences between American and European exposure to Russia’s economy.” E.g., “European Union trade with Russia...amounted to almost \$370 billion in 2012, compared with United States-Russia trade of \$26 billion....What that means is that any sanctions that really bite will cost Europe a lot more than the United States.”

Not to worry, by implication we are dealing with a Hitler wannabe: “Europe’s concern over the economic repercussions of broader economic sanctions are understandable. But that should not lead to any myopia about the danger Mr. Putin poses and the need to rein him in.” I have the feeling that when we speak of Putin and Russia, we are holding up a mirror catching our own reflection. What of the danger Obama poses and the need to rein him in? The Times goes on to describe Putin in terms of “[h]is authoritarian behavior at home.” What of Obama’s policies on surveillance, government transparency, Espionage Act prosecutions of whistleblowers? Quoting German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, “‘We’ve slid into the worst crisis since the end of the Cold war,’” The Times itself closes, “That crisis will only get worse unless the West is prepared to unite behind serious economic sanctions that hurt Russia’s financial, energy and military sectors.” Translation: Starve the bastards.

My New York Times Comments on, respectively, Baker’s article on the search for Putin’s wealth and the editorial on Putin, same dates, follow:

I

Assuming the best case scenario, from the US standpoint, how does this affect one’s judgment about, or invalidate, Putin’s policies? Is this germane to his resistance to American global hegemony? Does this somewhat reverse the facts of fascist and Nazi-antecedent participation in the Kiev government? Does Putin’s wealth or lack thereof change the reality of a US-assisted COUP of a democratically-elected government in Ukraine?

Some perspective here, please. If one cannot refute the policy, then go after the man; in plain language, demonize. Paradoxically, we blame Putin here for what in America is worshipped, to wit, the accumulation of wealth. How have it both ways, the insinuation Russia somehow is still communist, then attack the leadership of capitalistic enrichment—forgetting all the while America’s participation (e.g., Jeffrey Sachs as the tip of the US policy iceberg) in the systemic transformation.



Also, this may come back to haunt us: Obama's Martha Vineyard vacations, palsy-walsy attitude toward Wall Street, administration record of deregulation and presiding over the most flagrant maldistribution of wealth in US history. Obama strikes this writer as the envious guy, nose pressed to the window, hoping the wealth he so admires will rub off. And clearly he EXULTS in the trappings of office, deplaning from Air Force One. Criticize Putin by all means, but on POLICY, not on personal matters, unless the latter can be shown relevant to policy itself.

## II

By all means, beat the drums of WAR (sanctions being another name for war on a more sophisticated level, and a likely prelude to the real thing). The Times should move its Editorial Board to—depending on space—the White House Propaganda Ministry and the Pentagon, where it will be closer in spouting the Administration line.

By all means, demonize Putin. Where, a word on the Ukraine coup that brought events to a head? Where, Obama on assassination? Where, Obama on massive surveillance and eavesdropping on foreign leaders? Where, Obama on two major interventions, CIA-JSOC global involvement on subversion and regime change? Where, Obama on using the FBI for cyberattacks? Where, Obama on contempt for transparent government and freedom of the press, as in Espionage Act prosecutions for whistleblowers?

Since the death of Arthur Sulzberger, who had the courage to publish the Pentagon Papers, The Times, on national-security, has gone steadily downhill, now a champion of Cold War politics. Where is NYT's commitment to balance and journalistic integrity? Not even a word on the projected plan—currently stopped by Putin—of bringing NATO forces to the Russian border? The paper has excellent national-security reporters—the editorial board might as well be miles away, for it does not read the front page: a schizophrenic arrangement.

MAY 2, 2014

### **Obama and the Arts**

Michael Shear, writing in the New York Times, "The Rise of the Drone Master: Pop Culture Recasts Obama," (Apr. 30), ventilates for public discussion an issue hitherto largely suppressed—or, among liberals especially, complicit in and/or overly cautious in criticism of Obama's policies and record, a response of indifference in order to shield him and perhaps protect the state of artistic expression itself from the basic criticism it deserves. The arts community, with few exceptions, glories in self-castration, jumping like Skinner's rats negotiating hurdles to grants, popular acceptance, recognition. Conscience is a scarce attribute, as "creative" persons choose subject matter light-years away from the suffering caused by the administration's domestic and foreign policy. Therefore, political consciousness likewise: We have no Brecht or George Grosz to call attention to fascistic structural-ideological trends, no Odets or Ben Shawn to reveal the lives of the dispossessed, no Aaron Copeland to present a magnificent Third Symphony dedicated to human emancipation from the forces of totalitarianism at home and abroad.

Yes, you'll say, the times are different, and that the older radical aesthetic no longer fits. How expect the all-pervasive privatization of structure and political economy NOT to penetrate downward into the makings of a solipsistic personality, callous—like Obama—to social misery and human suffering, seeking refuge in distorted national pride via asserting dominance over others (and in so doing, strengthening the same tendencies at home in the form of widening class differentials of wealth and power)? That's just the point, America, gradually over the last half-century, has changed for the worse—no longer even capable of confronting the repression it has created, directed to the poor, to unpopular ideas, to visions of brotherhood, as in Paul Robeson's tribute to "my kind of a guy," whether he's black, white, or tan.

No Robeson, not more than a sprinkling of writers, actors, painters, dancers, novelists, playwrights, in pop culture particularly a dearth of stand-up voices against war, intervention, indefinite detention, surveillance, torture, rendition, MILITARISM in large, a corporatism gathering to itself the reins of what is left of democracy, all of which define the fabric of daily life—to be ignored, or occasionally applauded, on the road to fame and fortune. How much of this can be blamed on the psychological consequences of advanced capitalism—I think a cop out, because between the System and the Individual there is vast space for resistance, resistance no longer evident. What then? Although a world trend, it appears that America intensifies the numbness which births explosive-destructive outbreaks of political sadism, the numbness which sunders human bonds of societal welfare, leaving in its wake—once again, Obama as the quintessential persona of our times—an emptiness, the psychopathology of losing one's identity in Structures of Power, crushing (as in targeted assassination) others for no other reason than a feigned belief that enemies lurk "out there," waiting to take what is rightfully ours.

Capitalism DOES play a role, a world disease of possessiveness trumping all other traits and inclinations in the human repertoire, but explanation, even there, must make room for conscious action, that of a society's ruling groups (now the military and intelligence communities welcomed into the charmed circle as junior members) calling the shots (pun unintended) of profit maximization and global hegemony, on one hands, and, on the other, off to the side, the artistic community (broadly conceived), derelict in its inner soul as that which must transcend capitalism—indeed, all social systems—in preserving what is distinctively human, a creative impulse nowhere supplied outside the self, what some 19th century writers, like my favorite American reformer, Henry Demarest Lloyd, called, the divine spark (and collectively, "the divinity of humanity"), a conflict, remaining on the conscious level, between what Lloyd in his classic analysis of US monopolism, valid to this day, called, "Wealth Against Commonwealth."

Commonwealth does not exist today, nor does the artistic vision of transcendence and temperament of fearless facing down of Authority, either. One cannot hold the Arts responsible, yet neither can one let the situation go on still further, which is no more than the normalization of repression. The Arts must contest against normalization per se, constantly striving to enlarge human self-expression as the first step for reaching out, one to another, to building a human community shorn of deception, fallacious leadership, manipulation—what has become the norm of political life. In Shear's article, the striking point to me is not the handful of examples protesting government policy—centered, he points out, on surveillance and loss of privacy—but their general paucity, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Where the counterpart to McBird and Strangelove, where Of Mice and Men, Waiting for Lefty, where the next group of Hollywood Ten? McCarthyism had one

blessing, its obviousness and intellectual savagery, so that people could and DID fight back. Today we have Obama, NSA, DOJ (with its contempt for habeas corpus rights and civil liberties—Obama as well as Holder, to blame), the National Security State in full bloom, most Americans, the artist (again, broadly conceived) right in there, complacent and compliant.

Ah, the exceptions though, the best, most straightforward in Shear's account: "On the campus of Occidental College in Los Angeles, the artists Nadia Afghani and Matt Fisher sculpted a full-size 55-foot-wide MQ-1B Predator drone out of mud. In an accompanying manifesto titled 'We Will Show You Fear in a Handful of Dust,' the artists say they are 'proposing and modeling a possible act of resistance to the authoritarian machinery' of the drones." I write this on May Day, with tears in my eyes, for the victims of the armed drones whose missiles left only blood spats where human beings, flesh and blood like my own, once stood, and with anger in my heart, for the monsters in human form responsible for the whole "authoritarian machinery" driving this nation to the edge of fascism.

My New York Times Comment on the Shear article, same date, follows:

Obama has a visceral contempt for transparency, an attitude the tip of the iceberg for a REPRESSIVE society, nowhere better seen than in his campaign of massive surveillance of American society, that which is antithetical to the free expression of the arts and, as in his Espionage Act prosecutions, of truth itself.

Until recently the US artistic community has shown little guts in the opposition to fascistic-inclined government and public policy, a reflection of just how much the arts (I use the term inclusively) is overly-commercialized and in practice has groveled in the face of wealth.

If this is finally changing, and kudos to Shear for the article, it is certainly about time: The arts are an index of human freedom, or at least should be, and cowed submission speaks volumes about the degradation and commercialism heretofore seen. Drones are an excellent departure point, a POTUS poring over hit lists with his fellow zealots, personally authorizing assassination. No film noir could possibly depict a graver evil.

It is a function of the Arts to wake the people up, a populace which has countenanced multiple interventions and regime change under Obama, while transforming the nation into the most economically UNEQUAL in its history: the top 0.1% equals, what, at least the bottom 50%—and with unequal wealth comes unequal power, Obama presiding over a class-state ideally suited to militarism, which he abets at every opportunity.

Power to the Arts.

MAY 6, 2014

### **FBI Authorized Cyberattacks**

The saying, "the devil is in the details," is a wise rule in social analysis. Dramatic high points are well and good, but more indicative and convincing of basic trends are everyday ongoing practices and policies, in this case, FBI recruitment of hackers to do the dirty work of cyberwarfare. We know the FBI, in violation of its charter, is active overseas, as is the CIA, equally violative, within

the US, a cross-jurisdiction handy in promoting repression, sometimes with a less traceable fingerprint. Find or create an informant, here, Hector Monsegur, let him work undercover (erecting a wall of deniability for the Bureau), charge him with responsibility for establishing a network of hackers which, turned loose on the computer systems of foreign governments, banks, etc., provides a vast wealth of data that, through Monsegur, is passed back to Washington. In return, the informant is given protection, although one of his assistants, Jeremy Hammond, is now serving a 10-year prison term. Part of this protection is that all documents in the case are still heavily redacted, and that sentencing him has been stalled probably indefinitely—typical FBI/CIA lese majesty, the cavalier disregard for the dignity and meaning of democracy.

Although small potatoes compared with the campaign of surveillance at home, eavesdropping abroad on foreign leaders, that has been mounted by NSA, also roaming the ranch scot-free, it's useful to know that behind the headlines, our jackbooted bureaucrats are busy on numerous fronts. While Monsegur's team probably was not involved in cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, a task for the Real Pros, yet its ground-level activities may be a clearer sign of the gnawing away at democratic principles, which, we must be reminded, include respect for privacy. Under Obama, civil liberties have shrivelled, an inclusive negation of respect, so that cyberwarfare is inseparable from Espionage Act attacks on whistleblowers, both cut from the same cloth of unified totalitarian preemptive strikes against whatever USG deemed threatening. Transparency gone, the path is opened for taking the offensive, all for the sake of a global hegemony predicated on a compliant populace at home and the means for achieving the mastery of international markets!

Monsegur and Hammond are the minnows, Obama and his military-intelligence communities of minions the hammerhead sharks, in the fast-encroaching wholesale militarization of American capitalism and the society and culture in general. There is a clear interrelationship between this FBI venture into illegality (by that criterion, Monsegur stands far back in line to the provocateurs, inciters of violence, etc., in the Bureau's employ) and Obama's recent trip to the Far East, "friends and allies" being encouraged to form a united front against China. Both represent America's TOTALIZATION of effort unilaterally to control the ground rules of world politics and the international system. Spy, repress, foment hostility, incite to violence, do whatever it takes to stay on top.

Mark Mazzetti's New York Times article, "F.B.I. Informant Is Tied to Cyberattacks Abroad," (Apr. 24), reports, "An informant working for the F.B.I. coordinated a 2012 campaign of hundreds of cyberattacks on foreign websites, including some operated by the governments of Iran, Syria, Brazil, and Pakistan, according to documents and interviews with people involved in the attacks." Though he doesn't say it, I sense blowback in light of the administration's penchant for cyberwarfare. Like drone assassination, Obama's rule of thumb is maximum damage with fewest boots on the ground whenever feasible. Even his Pacific-first strategy is intended, as evidence of US power, to overawe China primarily through naval forces and long-range strategic bombers. Here, cyberwarfare plugs into his and America's fascination with high-tech weaponry, which, as in the case of the modernization of the nuclear arsenal, somehow is made to appear antiseptic and nonviolative of international standards. Carnage is the more chilling in seeming bloodless.

Mazzetti continues: "Exploiting a vulnerability in a popular web hosting software, the informant directed at least one hacker to extract vast amounts of data—from bank records to login information—from the government servers of a number of countries and upload it to a server

monitored by the F.B.I., according to court statements.” This is persuasive evidence of F.B.I. involvement in foreign operations. Less known, or even imagined, the FBI was playing a double game. It simultaneously arrested hackers while encouraging the practice. However, the public is intentionally kept in the dark: “The details of the 2012 episode have, until now, been kept largely a secret in closed sessions of a federal court in New York and heavily redacted documents.” The situation has hardly changed. What emerges is damning: “While the documents do not indicate whether the F.B.I. directly ordered the attacks, they suggest that the government may have used hackers to gather intelligence overseas even as investigators were trying to dismantle hacking groups like Anonymous and send computer activists away for lengthy prison terms.”

Like Willie Sutton, who robbed banks because that’s where the money was, the FBI attacked the group Anonymous because that’s where the hackers were, some who could be turned around under pressure of jail sentences. Enter Monsegur, “who used the Internet alias Sabu and became a prominent hacker within Anonymous,” attacking “high-profile targets, including PayPal and MasterCard.” In 2012, having been arrested earlier by the FBI, he “already spent months working to help the bureau identify other members of Anonymous,” a standard technique for turning potential informants: Have something on them to keep them in line and compel cooperation. He recruited Hammond and together, in December 2012, they worked “to sabotage the computer servers of Stratfor Global Intelligence” of Austin. From that point, Monsegur had his man, supplying him “with lists of foreign websites that might be vulnerable to sabotage.” We may never learn the why and wherefore of the Stratfor episode; the court documents remain heavily redacted. Hammond pled guilty “to the Stratfor operation and other computer attacks” inside the US, perhaps in exchange for a lighter sentence, in that “he has not been charged with any crimes in connection with the attacks against foreign countries,” no doubt the US being fearful their identities might come out.

I sense Hammond wanted to talk—yet he has been forbidden, “one of the terms of a protective order [in which he could not identify specific foreign government websites] imposed by the judge.” Mazzetti adds, “The names of the targeted countries are also redacted from court documents.” Yet “an uncensored version” of Hammond’s court statement “had been leaked online the day of his sentencing in November [2013],” a target list including “more than 2,000 Internet domains,” all under Monsegur’s direction, such as—actually, not small potatoes at all—“government websites in Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey and Brazil and other government sites, like those of the Polish Embassy in Britain and the Ministry of Electricity in Iraq.”

The details in USG exploiting “major flaws in Internet security,” and how Monsegur and Hammond “had become aware of a vulnerability in a web-hosting software called Plesk that allowed backdoor access to thousands of websites,” so that Hammond could “gain access to computer servers without needing a user name or password,” help to explain the scope and success of the hacking operation. Monsegur continually gave Hammond “new foreign sites to penetrate.” The emails and databases once extracted were “uploaded to a computer server controlled” by Monsegur (himself careful not to get his hands dirty), a procedure also repeated with another hacker, from Brazil, who “was asked to attack Brazilian government websites.” (America demonizes Russia and China, and claims for itself an Exceptionalism of Innocence and Purity, in the act of criticizing them.)

Denouement: Hammond said in prison, “Sabu wasn’t getting his hands dirty.” Meanwhile, Monsegur, arrested in mid-2011, began his cooperation with the FBI soon thereafter, praised by a

federal prosecutor in a closed hearing in August 2011 for “cooperating with the government proactively” and “literally work[ing] around the clock with federal agents” to finger others. Mazzetti concludes: “Mr. Monsegur’s sentencing hearing has been repeatedly delayed, leading to speculation that he is still working as a government informer. His current location is unknown.” He and Hammond are “in constant contact... through encrypted Internet chats,” using Jabber and aliases, Hammond in one conversation saying he hoped the information “would be put ‘to good use,’” the other reassuring him, “‘Trust me. Everything I do serves a purpose.’” Hammond, Mazzetti writes, sitting in prison, “wonders if F.B.I. agents might also have been on the other end of the communications.”

Is there no honor among thieves? In any case, we instinctively know, as Americans, whom our heroes are, Edward Snowden not being among them. My New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

More evidence of the National Security State under Obama as a threat to US civil liberties, in this case, the FBI, presumed to operate only domestically, conducting full-throat foreign operations, operations of cyberwarfare extremely disruptive of international relations. And where are Feinstein and Rogers, in their respective committees, excoriating the FBI the way they have already done to Snowden? This is incipient fascism becoming actualized.

Like the CIA, the FBI throughout its history has been a rogue operation expanding beyond jurisdictional lines. Even domestically it has been severely right-wing, as in Hoover’s attacks on Martin Luther King. And never chastised for its illegal and ruthless tactics. Why not? Why not, in this case, a thorough fumigation of the Augean stables?

As one who was in Mississippi during Freedom Summer I saw the young volunteers, constantly threatened with death (as happened with Schwerner-Goodman-Cheney), who, in making complaints, were then questioned by the FBI (I sat in on these at COFO headquarters in Jackson), browbeaten, more likely, so that the victim became the villain. A sorry record, in which the FBI to this day is synonymous with POLICE STATE. Thank you, Obama, for giving it the green light.

MAY 9, 2014

### **Obama, Putin, the Ukraine: A Symbolic Lynching**

The murder of a 17-year old German exchange student, Dören Dede, in the act of committing a midnight prank in a garage whose door was left open, video camera and sensors at the ready, alerting the homeowner who rushed for his shotgun, fired four blasts in the dark, legally/constitutionally protected by the Montana “Castle” law, killing the youngster—a law, receiving bipartisan endorsement, which amended a 2009 law specifying the imminence of mortal danger as grounds, now, eliminating the provision to allow unconditional license to kill on one’s property, IS America in microcosm circa 2014.

How did we get this way? Jack Healy, in a NYT article, “A Boy Shot, and Regret on Montana ‘Castle’ Law,” (May 7), describes the scene—although judging from readers’ comments, nationally, to the article, regrets are in short supply. Many Americans would have pulled the trigger. This

contempt for human life, often paraded as pride of gun ownership as the ultimate manifestation of freedom (next, of course, to the property right itself), forms, as microcosms of reality often do, the background for the current justification of the fascist takeover of Ukraine, the demonization of Putin. Whether America is bound up in pervasive fear (of what lies Out There), or equally pervasive GUILT for asserting global dominance over the broken bodies of hundreds of thousands, the trigger-response (pun not intended) to whatever is construed as menacing—single-payer system, diminished military budget, even speed limits on the Interstates—connotes bravery, individualism, Exceptionalism, the American Spirit.

The psychopathology of violence inheres in the nation's DNA, wherever one looks, whether Missoula, Newtown, or reaching out to, in one's heart of hearts, praise the thugs who burned alive the unarmed protesters in Odessa recently, or club OWS demonstrators in New York. This violence is the kissing cousin of counterrevolution, itself hatred of, contempt for, bitterness against, any who strive for an alternative path to happiness. If it isn't 100% American, it must be socialist, communist, loathsome, vile.

Healy begins: "Teenagers call it garage hopping. The goal was to sneak into an open garage, steal some beer or other items and slip away into the night. It was dumb and clearly illegal. It was not supposed to be deadly." But it was, and, given the "Castle" law, intentionally so. The killer is out on bail. Perhaps this helps to explain America's low reputation in the world, along with private contractors clearing intersections in Iraq with machinegun fire, torture in Afghan prisons, turning people into blood spats wherever armed drones brandish the flag, a reputation altogether suppressed from mind and sight at the water's edge, part of the psychopathology, myopic to a fault.

Healy again: "German consular officials have called for justice....In Mr. Dede's hometown, Hamburg, hundreds of his stunned relatives, friends and soccer teammates attended memorials, holding photos of Mr. Dede and unfurling a banner that read, 'Our brother is dying while America is looking on.'" Soccer teammates, a culture seemingly like our own, yet having strict gun laws and a mentalset which, after the experience of, and participation in, Naziism, has led to eschewing gratuitous violence. In the "castle doctrine," having NRA support, the 2009 law—he writes—"placed the burden on prosecutors to rebut claims of self-defense," and therefore, Montana residents "can use force if they reasonably believe" self-defense is necessary. The assailant's lawyer: "He just didn't know what was going on. Then he started to shoot." Even a Democratic state representative who wanted to repeal the recent change in the law, hastened to add: "I'm a liberal legislator from Montana, and I have a handgun in my closet." At least she had the decency to add, "We are proud of our gun-owning tradition, but enough is enough. It's like a license to kill."

The details of the murder are heart-wrenching. The couple left the garage open to set a trap, leaving a purse in the back of the garage. A hairstylist reported that the shooter "had come into the Great Clips salon three days before the shooting and talked about how he had been waiting with his shotgun for three nights 'to shoot some kid,'" because of two earlier burglaries in the area. The fateful night, a neighbor "heard a few yells of 'Hey!' or 'Wait!' from inside the garage, and then gunshots....The friend accompanying Mr. Dede that night, an exchange student from Ecuador, stayed outside the home." The host family of Dede, "who say they have never locked their doors and have never been burglarized, have spent the last week grieving for a 17-year-old who had begun to feel like a family member. One said, "Whatever happened to turning the lights on and yelling, 'Hey kids, go home'?" The other: "Or closing the garage door?"

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Missoula to Washington is a straight line projection. A war crisis is brewing, largely, I would argue, because, like Montana's gun culture, replicated all over America, symptomatic of a deeper clutching at straws to remain the unilateral global superpower capable of dictating terms of national existence to all others, the US, seeing itself threatened, invokes its own "Castle Doctrine," the license to kill, subject to our own perception. Obama's loathing for Putin, personally, because Putin does not genuflect before him, flattering him, praising him to the heavens, ideologically, because he sees through the program of global hegemony which stamps the Obama presidency, has led to, not simply a campaign of demonization, pressure being exerted on the media to follow suit, but also the concrete militarization of diplomacy (?) in the present, willed confrontation with Russia. Turn, then, to Neil MacFarquhar's article in *The Times*, "Putin Announces Pullback from Ukraine Border," (May 7), for an account which should on the surface have relieved tensions given the evident de-escalation of any possible military threat, and instead is fitted into the continued narrative of Russian (subliminally, Soviet) purported aggression. Like US gun freaks who perceive social justice through a shoot-on-sight credo, Obama and USG perceive peace as a national condition of weakness, unmanly, appeasement writ large, in face of self-constructed demons ready to steal our precious heritage of freedom (the purse in the back of the garage).

Just try it! We'll show you! Putin is actually slandered for the pullback, because denying America its confrontation, the titillating frisson of always being in a state of war readiness, lest we question our own manliness and ideological convictions. (Of the latter, not to worry, centuries of indoctrination in the moral worth of the property-right, incorporated into the definition of American democracy, places the value system on rock-ribbed foundations. And as for the former, bullying over the same time frame—perhaps bullying, both at home, as in working people and minorities, and abroad, becoming an integral feature, and implementing mechanism, of democracy—serves as healing ointment to stave off doubts.) Thus, "In an apparent [only an apparent, the word choice loaded] attempt to halt the escalating violence in southeastern Ukraine," Putin ordered "troops back from the border, and he urged Ukrainian separatists [another loaded choice, many calling instead for greater federalism and rejecting formal integration with Russia] to call off a referendum on sovereignty they had hoped to hold on Sunday."

Cold water is dashed on Putin's role here, the pullback being perhaps less important than his call for moderation, including a direct dialogue between the protesters and the Kiev government. Even the reporter sees this, quoting Putin that he was appealing "to representatives of southeast Ukraine and supporters of federalization to hold off the referendum scheduled for May 11, in order to give this dialogue the conditions it needs to have a chance." With Didier Burkhalter, president of Switzerland and chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) beside him, Putin states: "We think the most important thing now is to launch direct dialogue, genuine, full-fledged dialogue between the Kiev authorities and representatives of southeast Ukraine. This dialogue could give people from southeast Ukraine the chance to see that their lawful rights in Ukraine really will be guaranteed."

MacFarquhar reports that Putin, despite the coup, could accept the results of the May 25 presidential election: "Let me stress that the presidential election the Kiev authorities plan to hold is a step in the right direction, but will not solve anything unless all of Ukraine's people first understand how their rights will be guaranteed once the election has taken place." The reporter



sought to dismiss the statement by first saying that Putin “left the door open to Russia accepting under certain conditions” the election, yet these “certain conditions” are far different from Obama and the West’s propaganda barrage about an imminent invasion and the destruction of Ukraine as a unified state. This whole pattern of thinking is INEXCUSABLE, an incitement to further building a war cloud. Putin’s intentions are clear. He is even quoted further as saying, “We all want the crisis to end as soon as possible, and in such a way that takes into account the interests of all people in Ukraine no matter where they live.”

From this point, everything is downhill. The mediation, which is light-years away from the accusations projecting Russian conquest, is reinterpreted to mean, still the menace of conquest, an achievement of “what Russia has been seeking since the rebellion in Kiev overthrew [Yanukovych],” i.e., regional autonomy, “including electing their own governors and directing their own foreign policy with their immediate neighbors.” This last is problematic, given Putin’s position on federalization, but more to the point, this is not a posture of conquest; rather than “directing their own foreign policy,” his position is that the region would have a veto on the emplacement of NATO troops on the Russian border—to me, a not unreasonable position. Much of the remainder of the article is given over to canvassing expressions of suspicion, his own, though divorced from evidence, and that of various analysts, including, the last word, a gem from Viktor Zamyatin (“I don’t have any basis to say at this point that his strategy is changing; I see that his rhetoric is changing”), who is “a political analyst with the Kiev-based Razumkov Center think tank,” a wholly disinterested (?) party.

My New York Times Comment to the MacFarquhar article, same date, follows, along with two replies, also same date, and my response to them. I do not wish to try the reader’s patience, but the first so beautifully captures the Cold War mindset (red-baiting and all), a far-better caricature than I could hope to write, that its value lies in telling us what opponents of current policy have to contend with in terms of rigid ideology. In answer to each of the replies, I was enabled to explore further the significance of the assault on Putin. The insinuation: I am therefore a fellow-traveler. Welcome back, Joe.

I My Comment to the article:

I expect better of MacFarquhar and The Times—everything here to disparage Putin. Why the one-sidedness, except that NYT has become an uncritical mouthpiece of the administration, abandoning objective journalism. There was no point for the remark, “there was some chance that it was all a feint,” unless to smear Putin, and the sentence, “By pulling back from the threat, Mr. Putin seemed to be trying to reassert some measure of control,” means that he is damned if he does, damned if he doesn’t, so that the pullback per se is first denied, and then given negative meaning. This kind of distortion disgraces the memory of A.O. Sulzberger.

Putin even urges dialogue and postponing the referendum; meanwhile all Obama can do, like a spoiled brat or bully, is stir the pot in order to a) bring NATO to Russia’s border, and b) incite tensions in the hope of dramatic confrontation. No softie there. With Brennan, Clapper, and Rice by his side, America, in the name of liberal humanitarianism, is spoiling for a fight. And after Russia, comes China. Obama’s Pacific Rim tour is at one with his get-

tough policy toward Russia—do to both Russia and China the same thing: encirclement, containment, isolation.

No doubt The Times editorial board would applaud, no longer indecisive, now the determined leader of the Free World, a fusion therefore of counterterrorism, anticommunism (we're still fixed on the Cold War, no matter the changes in Russia and China), and counterrevolution.

## II First reader's response (name deleted):

Simply Amazing analogy. Are you sure you are from Michigan? Sounds like documentation from the party line to me. How can anyone with any understanding of Putin the Man, The Dictator, etc., ever for one second think that he plays like the rest of the world and that somehow nothing is his fault? Every move he has made in the past 23 years in direct relation to the big bad evil U.S.A.! We are so evil, we want the whole world! Everything that happens all over the world is due to American Imperialism. I think I'll turn this off now. This is digressing to nothing more than a forum for the Russian state Party line. Sickening. I will say it one more time. Putin is a thug, a murderer, an individual that thinks that what anyone else has belongs to him and he will stop at nothing to take it, from super bowl rings, to Nations. How can any sane person put him the same category of the President of United States. I fear for our country if your ideology is any way indicative of a great number of people now living in this US.

## III My reply to first reader:

Good, I respect spirited disagreement. I ask in return: Does Putin have a hit list and Terror Tuesdays sit around personally authorizing Assassinations? Has Putin mounted two unjustified interventions, Iraq and Afghanistan, in sync with GWB? Has Putin reached the same degree of contempt for civil liberties via massive surveillance, eavesdropping on foreign leaders, and using the Espionage Act to silence whistleblowers? Has Putin engineered the coup that toppled the Ukrainian democratically-elected president, or for that matter sponsored paramilitary operations of CIA-JSOC for regime change? Has Putin developed the "pivot," the Pacific-first strategy, for isolating China—or kept a global network of military bases, or sought a military alliance (NATO) right up to the border of America?

In the spirit of frank discussion I ask you and NYT posters who enthusiastically condemn Putin to answer my questions. I suggest Putin in this developing crisis is acting more responsibly than Obama, that Lavrov is more committed to peace than Kerry, that Obama's national-security team is far more determined on a course of war (eventually, nuclear) than Putin's team. America has been an aggressor for so long that we take that for granted. One does not have to be a stooge of the Kremlin (of which you accuse me) to recognize the dire consequences of US policy. Red-baiting seems old-fashioned; we've been through that with McCarthyism. I'm glad to see it back in style.

## IV Second reader's reply (name deleted):

I see nothing in this article that dishonors the memory of Arthur Sulzberger, Sr. I think he would be quite proud of the Times, were he alive today.

V My reply to second reader:

You neglect to mention that Sulzberger, Sr., published the Pentagon Papers, a brave act, in support of freedom of the press, in DEFIANCE of USG. Obama, beyond an effective White House machine for managing news, has shown greater contempt for government transparency than any previous POTUS. Espionage Act prosecutions, more than all presidents combined. His DOJ setting dangerous precedents in disrespect for habeas corpus rights (detainees) and Obama personally approving indefinite detention.

You sully A.O.S.'s journalistic courage through omitting that chapter, and by implication, giving Obama a free pass in his efforts to undermine a free press. Sorry, but I think of Snowden as an American patriot exposing the corruption, illegality, and murderous intent (for what else are drone killings?) of Obama and his administration. We of course differ, but I await your and the many posters' response to Obama's civil liberties record, of which freedom of the press is among the most important.

Of course you are on safe ground. Most Times readers haven't the vaguest idea who A.O.S. was—I only wish the present editorial board would take seriously his legacy and refrain from the demonization of Putin. News coverage, yes; but not losing sight of the initial coup and the move to place NATO on the border. Days ago, 40 unarmed protesters were burned to death in Odessa by fascist thugs. Where the outcry, from NYT or its posters?

MAY 12, 2014

### **Obama Wants War**

And now Ukraine, in hindsight quite predictable. Quantitative becomes qualitative at some point in the logic of events—perhaps the coup, perhaps the Pacific Rim visit to nail down Russia's eastern flank while simultaneously setting the stage for the next leap forward—encirclement, containment, isolation of China, or perhaps Slovyansk. When momentum builds, the transition can be so smooth, rather than abrupt, that the world, let alone the aggressive party, hardly notices—a negative “reset,” in the works for some time, well before Obama, going back to Cold War I (JFK, for starters), but, as with so much else (massive surveillance, drone assassination, global employment of CIA, foray into cyberwarfare), an intensification of the logic of events under Obama's watch as to award him the laurels of counterrevolution at the core of American doctrine and practice.

Like sexual foreplay taking its course, the eruption may come at any time, getting into bed (in this case, with indigenous fascism in the targeted country to match the structural-ideological fascism coming to a head at home), the preliminaries—beginning with Exceptionalism predisposed to global supremacy (its logic!)—render almost inevitable the outcome. Incipient fascism casts about for its mate, an infatuation consummated in advanced capitalism, the marriage brokers (JPMorgan Chase delegated to speak for all, on a rotating basis, along next, with one from the hedge fund operators, and still next, from “defense”) themselves but representatives of a vaster military-intelligence infrastructure of US “democracy” which encapsulates American historical-ideological development going back at least to the Open Door, nascent market fundamentalism grafted onto the Battleship Navy. With this background, Obama can hardly miss, although he cannot be allowed a

free pass as though merely going with the tide. Nor a free pass because to the Right of him, although he's STILL part of that formation, there lies the phenomenon of a political thuggery even more contemptuous of peace, civil liberties, a vibrant social safety net than he.

Sanctioning, nay, abetting, the Kiev coup of Svoboda-Right Sector-Bandera acolytes, all bred-in-the-bone native fascists, whose recent historical antecedents refer back to siding with the Nazis in World War II, and further back, an indigenous regional authoritarianism and anti-Semitism predating the Russian Revolution, the US fully comprehended the consequences of its own actions: a shot across the bow to Putin and Russia that Cold War 2 was in full swing (a flow of hegemonic animus hardly interrupted in any case). Obama, the presumed futurist, has brought us back squarely to the 1950s, Russia's and China's capitalistic features no defense against the subterranean propaganda offensive—however irrational, eagerly bought by a gullible American public—directed against anticommunism. We need an Enemy, to detract from our own more mundane purposes.

Even market penetration no longer suffices. Nor the profitability inhering in outsourcing. Nor the Imperial sheer delirium of crushing “native” populations (an outgrowth of manhandling blacks, first, in slavery, then segregation, and now, residual practices and premises of racism). Instead, the nation has reached the point of the petrification of its own ideology. Advanced capitalism, for its own survival, has a way of doing that; we actually believe counterrevolution (gussied up as anticommunism, gussied up still further as counterterrorism) is, as the key to the stabilization of world capitalism, led by our own, to which all others are tributary, as the summum bonum of human achievement and civilization. Self-serving? Of course, but the process of ideologization is for that very purpose, the veil of self-deception in the prosecution of self-interest (primarily for ruling groups, those below habituated through structural-economic pressure, the value system, and the whole educational process, to experience vicariously the fruits of the System received above). Ideology is indispensable for rationalizing (in both senses, portraying as true what is not, and Max Weber's stress on coordination and efficiency) the edifice of inequality and social cruelty, together reflections of increasing class differentiation in wealth distribution.

Obama is Johnny-on-the-spot, bailing out a decaying social order, irreconcilable about surrendering its global dominance to a bunch of upstarts (the inevitable decentralization of power in a multipolar world, starting with China, but also perceived as threats, Russia, not far behind, India and Brazil, and emergent modernization of the Third World itself), and now prepared for the showdown, before an irreversible DECLINE sets in. Maybe not a recapitulation of the 1950s, so much as the fading days of all Empires, the Roman perhaps being a good example. Obama here has the edge on his predecessors, not in the staying power of the befuddled and desperate Behemoth (its aggressiveness will only heighten the blowback, the social-political forces of retributive justice), but in the technological means to wreak havoc at home and abroad. Massive surveillance keeps the people unified; clamping down on whistleblowers, via the Espionage Act, keeps the media in line while preventing transparency in government. And the Court, in lockstep, is a buttress against civil liberties, even as it confers freedom-of-speech rights on money and shields corporate aggrandizement.

His advantage, then, is in keeping the show going longer on the domestic front, simultaneous with, and contingent upon, opening up the foreign front to more intervention, confrontation, and adventurism. Hence, Ukraine. Hence also, the potential for world conflagration. It takes a leader with a moral void at the center of his being to stay the course. It takes a populace so jaded,

containing so much pent-up aggression, so unfulfilled, perhaps unfulfillable, on the nonmaterial side of life, to abjectly follow, even call out for greater excesses, greater show of strength, greater MILITARISM, that a colossal death-instinct now takes hold, a what-the-hell-is-there-to-lose feeling of resentment directed at the outside world (and in reality, our own selves), to finally end it all.

Thank you, Mr. President, for giving vent to the national mood, and for typifying so well this exact point in American historical development. Now we can join our brothers-in-arms in Svoboda and Right Sector, standing proudly, resolutely, in the face of global people's aspirations for dignity and freedom from fear and want.

My New York Times Comment on Neil MacFarquhar's article, "On Triumphant Visit to Crimea, Putin Trumpets Russian Revival," (May 9), follows—an article fully reflective of the propagandistic groundwork building, The Times doing its share, for making intervention in Ukraine thinkable, greater confrontation with Russia, beyond a tightening of the sanctions regime, then entirely possible:

Why such venom in these accounts of Putin? Wherever possible, word choice reveals subtle turning of screws. As for Victory Day, this should be a world holiday, the defeat of Naziism. Russia lost millions, and saved our society. In return, we give them ashes. To boot, we help install a regime in Kiev that is neo-Nazi—no dispute on that. America has already compromised its democratic image through mass surveillance, enhanced interrogation, drone assassination, intervention, regime change—this urge for war with Russia and now China confirms any doubts.

Yet The Times continues its campaign of defamation, in a vacuum, for no mention of the coup; Svoboda, Right Sector; Bandera wannabes; encouragement of NATO placement on Russia's borders; the murder of peaceful demonstrators in Trade Union House, Odessa (burned to death, those jumping and severely injured then beaten with chains by fascist thugs).

That's the company we keep, the "friends" we make. There WILL be a reckoning. Bullying the world into submission, is already creating a backlash. The referendum will go on, despite Putin's helpfulness in trying to head it off. He does our work for us, except that our work is not peace but spoiling for a fight. NYT persists in using the term "separatists" knowing it to be false—federalism, regional autonomy, is not separatism. But it accomplishes its purposes of building up hatred toward Russia and Putin.

MAY 14, 2014

### **Iron Curtain around Corporate America**

I refer to General Motors, its ignition (death) switch, and company knowledge, over considerable time, that certain of its vehicles, because of the defect, were homicidal traps—and in absence of notification to their owners, as well as failure to rectify the lethal condition, we have with this Iconic Firm a case of premeditated murder. Too strong an indictment? GM is not only complicit in murder, its actions are causative in carrying out the heinous act. This is nothing new in what amounts to a solipsistic capitalism always protective of its own interests. The System, its

operations, financing, managerial control, and its relations to labor, all are predicated on a worshipful populace to look the other way, when its drive for profits have been gained even at the expense (some might say, particularly at the expense—as in the war-driven “defense” industries) of human lives. If profits are the bottom line of corporate organization, false consciousness is the ideational edifice resting on capitalist foundations.

GM is no stranger to the construction of a reverential attitude, public and government alike worshipping at its feet. Have no fear, its iconic status emblematic of Patriotic America will emerge unblemished, and the ignition-death-switch itself quickly forgotten, as new models are rolled out in showrooms and at the international car shows. Token compensation to the victims’ families to silence their grievances, and no doubt charged up to business expenses, will be widely publicized as the generosity of a compassionate corporatism—the analogue to the deplored while persisted in “collateral damage” of America’s latest gifts to the world, drone assassination and humanitarian interventionism.

There is a logic operating here, inseparable societal mechanisms of repression, war and corporatism in an interrelated structure, each servicing and dependent on the other. If one can kill with impunity at home, why not also abroad? Conversely, if abroad (where military power is meant to ensure impunity), via drones, regime change, embargoes, why not then at home? The logic appears to be impeccable, so much so as to be acted upon on a daily basis, as when intervention has been matched with attrition to the social safety net, or perhaps better yet, massive surveillance to elicit consent for a permanent war posture matched with the presumed imperatives of the National Security State, including a suppression of civil liberties and the denial of government transparency. I have not forgotten General Motors. What it had gotten away with exemplified the society and culture of Militarized Capitalism, a milieu allowing for honoring the strong as they run roughshod over all comers.

Patriotism knows no greater affection and loyalty.

GM, large as it is, is still a microcosm of the whole. The whole represents in America a corporatist polity, business as usual, business front and center, founded on hierarchical class arrangements that have been coded to justify and give praise to massive capital accumulation at the top. This becomes a great-chain-of-capitalist-being, within which, in the form of structural-ideological trickle-down, wealth distribution is progressively widened to ensure a wide gulf between rich and poor, the latter systemically tilted in the direction of an underclass, and a labor movement, somewhere above the bottom rungs, dispirited, narcotized into the peaceful slumber of acquiescence. We no longer feel the reverberation of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, nor the courage of UE (United Electrical) in standing up to McCarthyism. Radicals must come to terms with, as must labor itself, the diminution of militancy, now at a time when resistance to the antilabor climate, because of its diffuseness and a Democratic president, is perhaps at an all-time low.

One would not be surprised if labor, and specifically, the UAW, came to GM’s defense because it means jobs. One does not blame working people when they are down, but the symbiotic relationship between corporation and union is abandonment of radicalism, and with it, as here, the green light for GM to kill-for-profit. The ignition-switch issue provides an opening crack in the revelation of corporate nihilism—although the operations of the System on a daily basis should have made that evident, from banking and hedge funds to discriminatory treatment of labor

organizations. Yet it will most probably go for naught as business criminality is papered over in the spirit of market fundamentalism commixed with devotion to the nation, our noble warriors, etc.—whatever it takes to silence dissent...until dissent itself ceases to exist.

I am tempted to say that GM had kept silent about the ignition defect for over a decade in order to test the waters of how far its arrogance could go, a brazen staring down over whatever was left of American democratic principles. Obama, similarly, in his use of hit lists to assassinate Enemies of the State, has been testing the waters over how much illegality and vileness the American public would tolerate. In both cases, the mindset appears to have achieved success, therefore promising a further free hand in advancing questionable practices. When GM survives, as it will, the present skirmish of death-for-sale, its message to the American people is, knuckle under to the superior power of the corporation. Yours is not to question, just keep buying our goods. It is your patriotic duty, and besides, the psychodynamics of absolute power is working for us: The corporate context is one of authoritarianism, which provides cues to submission, willing submission bathed in the starlight of false consciousness.

Business depends on the flaunting of its strength and oppressiveness as demonstrating its status, not above the law, but singularly entwined with the law itself. Targeted assassination does the same thing for the expansion of Executive Power. And who knows, when drones will buzz constantly overhead, ready to pounce!

The indictment of GM for premeditated murder, given its failures of disclosure and ceasing manufacture of the defective part, will never happen. America closes ranks around its Dark Side, whether as war crimes, the treatment of minorities, contempt for civil liberties, or global aggressiveness, but especially, any criticism of its business system. Culture, institutions, values, all converge on capitalism, the apogee of perfection and social decency. Recall the aphorism, you can't tell the players without a program, or perhaps as well, You can't tell the program without the players, so inextricably bound together are they. The program is the militarization-financialization of advanced capitalism; the players, in this case, are GM, but also, a more-or-less cohesive ruling group made up of monolithic corporate units, capable of exerting influence in shaping a unified public policy which is based on domestic social control and foreign political-ideological-market expansion.

Monopoly capital fuses political economy and social order, the regimentation of the populace through the inculcation of false consciousness in lockstep with growing economic concentration. Hereboth the military and intelligence communities serve as willing assassins of conscience contributing their special skills in guarding the Property Right.

GM is unintelligible without CONTEXT, and, confining the record to a single week (my way of pointing to the quotidian reality of an inceptive fascism, the heart and soul of American social structure embodied in Exceptionalism), I refer to Paul Krugman's article, "Why Economics Failed," (May 1), for the protective setting (ah, microeconomics) which allows if not encourages GM and its behemoth-consorts to flourish free from the restraints of democratic governance, becoming instead dependent on war and expansion for its steady growth.

Krugman's concern, "inadequate demand," is code for taking ameliorative steps, which do not change the internal composition (i.e., class, wealth, power) of capitalism, but forestall its volatility and proneness to stagnation—not, however, as Keynes would have, with ample provision for public

spending, but capitalism, first, last, and always. Precisely the intellectual (?) climate for a GM-style close-to-the-chest maneuver to defraud the government (its decade-long knowledge that it was building killer-machines, as meanwhile, in bankruptcy, it took billions from the public trough following the 2008 financial debacle without revealing its dark-kept secret—as in Watergate, the cover-up crowds out the more significant crime), now fighting tooth-and-nail to get immunity from class-action suits and essentially claiming its present existence has nothing to do with its past behavior.

Krugman's best shot in explaining the financial crisis, anticepticizing the business system so that no trace of the corporation, banking firm, or financial-services industry appears, therefore an amoral backdrop in which things just happen, is mechanistic to a fault. He writes: "We were suffering from inadequate demand. The financial crisis and the housing bust created an environment in which everyone was trying to spend less, but my spending is your income and your spending is my income, so when everyone tries to cut spending at the same time the result is the overall decline in incomes and a depressed economy." This may seem remote from the topic, but rather than critical analysis, when the economic landscape is painted in glorious watercolors, the recipients of the academic largesse (seconded by a federal and state regulatory system virtually wholly in the pocket of the enterprises to be regulated), fear of detection for criminal behavior diminishes accordingly. And with God on its side, GM can do no wrong—a bitter thing to say, but one more item in the ideological pot fending off punishment. Trickle-down economics which originates at a higher point in the celestial heavens.

The context, then, when it is taken together, including the moral swamp of assassination, intervention, paramilitary operations, deregulation, and the punitive attitude toward civil liberties, all contribute to the individual's contempt for legal processes. This is also matched by business's contempt, so that a cloud of cynicism hangs over the entire society for that which stands behind the law, i.e., honesty, fair dealing, truthfulness, and compassion for one's fellows. Such contempt is one of negating responsibility and accountability for wrongdoing, capitalism bred-in-the-bone property-right selfishness, or better yet, fanaticism. From Hilary Stout and Bill Vlasic's article in *The Times*, "Hoping to Fend Off Suits, G.M. Is to Return to Bankruptcy Court," (May 2), we learn about the legal moves to evade that responsibility and accountability, chiefly, tricks for getting out from under through selective payment to the plaintiffs and, of course, a public relations campaign to announce the New GM, having nothing to do with the Old.

The tactic of returning to court: "On the surface, G.M. is merely asking the judge [Robert Gerber, Federal Bankruptcy Court of the Southern District of New York] to enforce a provision of its July 10, 2009, bankruptcy reorganization that insulated the 'new' company from lawsuits stemming from accidents that occurred before that date." "New" here implies immaculate conception, freedom from prosecution for past offenses (or crimes—the faulty ignition switch—causing far more deaths than GM admitted to, 13, by its account, limited only to front-end collisions wherein safety devices became inoperable because the defective switch shut them down), and the hope in seeking a favorable court ruling was to "shut down a rising tide of class-action lawsuits stemming from its recall of 2.6 million cars because of a dangerously defective ignition switch that it now links to 13 deaths." (It appears that the people who keep track of GM deaths are the same ones who keep track of Obama's drone deaths, or at least trained in the same school of minimization and stonewalling public inquiry and knowledge.)



The reporters point out that by in effect reopening the bankruptcy proceedings, GM may have made things worse for itself, because then the question of FRAUD can be raised: “Objections have poured into the court from plaintiffs in cases around the country, alleging that the company committed fraud...five years ago by not disclosing the potential liabilities from the faulty switch, a problem it now admits was known in parts of the company for more than a decade before the recall.” As for stonewalling, inquiries still have not answered the question, “how high up in the company did the knowledge of the switch defect go? G.M. has largely declined to make employees available for questioning and has continually cited its own internal investigation.” GM lawyers “did not return phone calls.” One shrewd lawyer, Richard Levin, head of the restructuring practice at Cravath, Swaine, & Moore, saw wider implications for business in the effort to enforce the bankruptcy order: “This may be an important case for teaching us how bankruptcy sales can relieve a company of its past mistakes.” GM is in the vanguard for gaining judicial approval for shielding corporations from damages for their past misdeeds.

Plaintiffs’ lawyers are not sitting back, Edward Weisfelner stating: “We are going to ask the new G.M. for some admissions and stipulated facts [presumably, by my understanding, what GM knew and when about the defective switch].” Thus, he continues: “The basic issues are that the old G.M. knew about this defect, could reasonably ascertain who the affected consumers were, should have and could have given direct notice.” Clearly he is not persuaded by the old-new folderol, and adds: “These people were deprived of their due process.” GM for its part stands ready, its strategy being “to take some of the emotion out of the bankruptcy court battle by moving for the dismissal only of the economic loss cases—and not any personal injury or wrongful death lawsuits tied to the ignition defect.” Two points: the reporters note that, although a good public-relations gambit, yet “getting rid of the economic cases is probably more valuable to the company since the price tag for dozens of class actions is likely to be higher.” Not to mention, which the reporters pass over, that GM can argue till the cows come home the number of personal injuries and wrongful deaths and their circumstances. And Kenneth Feinberg, the victims-compensation-fund expert has been called in by GM, hardly a disinterested party.

Finally, Stout and Danielle Ivory’s follow-up account, “G.M. Talks to Families With Claims Over Defects,” (May 2), deals with the still preliminary phase, Feinberg meeting with the lawyer “who represents more than 300 clients with wrongful death or personal injury claims, a universe far larger than the 13 deaths and 32 crashes that G.M. has linked to the problem.” Feinberg: “The sole purpose was for me to listen.” GM had a two-pronged strategy (beyond listening): “compensate accident victims and their families—even as it moves to aggressively shut down other types of cases, including dozens of class-action lawsuits seeking compensation for economic losses like the diminished value of the recalled vehicles.”

From GM’s standpoint, the goal was “to make the cases go away.” A subtle tactic here is, although coming into court for liability protection, it wants out-of-court settlements: “G.M. officials, including Mary T. Barra, the chief executive, have indicated that they expect Mr. Feinberg to complete his business by June. The idea is to come up with a formula for compensating victims, and criteria for determining who is eligible, outside the courts. The company has not given any indication of how much money it may set aside to compensate victims.” These last words make for a fitting conclusion, the Iron Curtain around US business holding firm.

My New York Times Comments, first, on Krugman's article, same date, second, Stout and Vlastic, same date, and third, Stout and Ivory, May 3, follow:

## I

"...my spending is your income and your spending is my income," sounds like a childish merry-go-round tune. No word anywhere, about the military (and the impact of spending on war, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, etc., for the social safety net), no word on widening class-differential of wealth, income, and power, for creating widespread UNDERCONSUMPTION (Prof. K. prefers the more salubrious, "inadequate demand"), and instead, the tightly bound-up economic universe of consumerism, as when Ike a half-century ago rode the wave of, "you auto buy now."

Macroeconomics is the tool of advanced capitalism; profits trump human welfare. Economists have long ago abandoned dispassionate analysis to serve as the Swiss Guard of Vested Interests (Veblen). Spend, spend, but not on a single-payer health system, not on tuition-free public education, not on crumbling infrastructure via New Deal, rather than private-contractor, auspices. Everything here represents a claustrophobic capitalism, the utter intellectual bankruptcy of present-day economics as a discipline.

Prof. K., the emperor (here USG, Treasury, the academic world) wears no clothes. I refer the lot, particularly academics, to Robert A. Brady's (Columbia economist in a franker time), *Business as a System of Power*. No one expects economists on the barricades, but should not GM's death-ignition system give pause for thought?

## II

Bankruptcy court should not be a refuge for scoundrels. Given the conservatism of the judiciary when it comes to penalizing American business for wrongful conduct, esp. should the case go to the Supreme Court, odds are that GM will enjoy govt. protection and get off scot-free. I.e., no justice for the victims, as usual.

This sleight of hand, the new GM, not the old, allows it to escape the moral consequences of its history—something that should never be tolerated if one believes in the rule of law and principle of ACCOUNTABILITY. Weisfelner's remark, "These people were deprived of their due process," must be amended to say, they were deprived of their lives. GM knowingly allowed the death-switch to be operable for years. In blunt terms, the corp. was complicit in commercial murder. All the while, it received the largess of the American public to stay afloat.

Too big to fail? Advanced welfare capitalism, from banks to autos, reveals its inner corruption, welfare for monopolism while welfare for the people is savaged (as in a diminishing social safety net)—Democrats and Republicans, labor and capital, alike joining in to erect an Iron Curtain around Corporate America.

I hope the plaintiffs and their attorneys hang tough, even if, and esp. if, this does irrevocable damage to GM's reputation and translation into weakened sales. The UAW places jobs above corporate responsibility, stripping unionism of any pretense of societal concern. Ditto GM execs, top to bottom.

### III

That Judge Gerber allowed the liability shield in GM's bankruptcy reorganization, does not auger well for the achievement of justice for the victims. Moreover, how much is Feinberg a neutral expert when in fact he was summoned by GM? Undoubtedly, like in Ibsen's "Enemy of the People," all parties—except those families of the dead and injured—will rally to GM's defense, as if it were wrapped in red-white-blue bunting. In America, major corporations are next to God, and to be worshipped with perhaps equal reverence.

MAY 16, 2014

#### **Springtime for Obama**

*For Gabriel Kolko – scholar-activist of human freedom.*

Mel Brooks, please don't go there. It's dangerous; artistic license only extends so far. Oh, alright, I can't stop you. Not "The Producers," you say, but its sequel, "The Despoilers," about pillagers of American democracy, and starring, not Zero Mostel, but an equally gifted actor, whose warm smile can melt the edges of any war crime, Barack Obama, with extensive theatrical training at Harvard Law, and coaching by Wall Street's finest, skilled in the art of duplicity. Mel, a sure winner, congratulations; central casting will never be the same. From now on, all roles featuring militarism, global conquest, the promotion of wealth concentration, cannot seek refuge in fictional treatments or the sci-fi genre (the Strangelovian scenario once and for all spoiled for amusement, and now confirmed as REAL) and necessarily must be identified, as to leadership, with a Democratic president.

Curtain. Chorus girls on an inclined stage—so audience can appreciate dance routine—riding on the top of miniature Predator drones (far more effective than the Swastika number of the earlier production); orchestra, recently augmented by members from Svoboda and Right Sector marching bands, in addition, NATO drum line; staging, with diverse groups—FBI, CIA, JSOC—scurrying about, mixing together in a blur of animated discussion (words popping from the din, "assassination," "regime change," along with free improvisation), and in the background somewhat muffled as diffuse noise, the sound—proudly stated in the Program Notes—of an authentic recording of "shock and awe" operations, courtesy of the Pentagon (the same team that brings you Stealth flyovers at football games). Thank you, Mel, for assigning the script to Ben Rhodes. (You knew you could not do it justice, such sight gags as Moses descending Mount Sinai with the Twenty—oops, Ten—Commandments, simply couldn't hack it.) As with the leading man, we need star quality throughout, here one fresh from the Goebbels School of Creative Writing, whose credits include the Cairo Speech pledging friendship to the Arab and Muslim world, and whose speech patterns are specially suited to the teleprompter. Wise choice, as is that of the accountant—no longer Gene Wilder, but in homage to corporatism, the firm of Brennan, Rice, and Clapper, whose schema for itemized deductions is finely tuned to take advantage of contributions to the newly formalized National Security State. The time is the present.

After much jubilation, the scene dissolves to a Kennedy Center Gala, black tie, celebrating the Leader and Liberalism, the two interchangeable, on the occasion of his triumphal tour of Pacific Rim "friends and allies," spreading American Good Will in the form of military alliances and joint-

military exercises whose purpose is the engagement/encirclement followed by the containment and subsequent isolation of China. The mood is upbeat. The Leader, in self-congratulatory mode, is celebrating the presumably successful launch of a two-front reinvigoration of the Cold War. The audience, fully appreciative of this goal and the spectacle surrounding it, is charmed by the scene, complacent, zealous in its dedication to militarism, Exceptionalism, unilateral global hegemony. (Not like that, in “The Producers,” stupefied, open-mouthed, at the blatancy of the Nazi-style allusions.)

Concluding Act One, Obama, center stage, having just returned from his Pacific Rim swing, in a soliloquy, breaks into a plaintive recitative, after announcing with great pride his proposed military alliances for achieving the encirclement of China, in complaint that he is misunderstood by his Republican critics and in fact is just as fascistically-inclined as they. Even his TransPacific Partnership (TPP) is not sufficiently appreciated in completing the containment and isolation of China. Shadow boxing with the ghosts of Stalin and Mao, he expected all to fall in line with adoration of his world-transformative persona, a blend of liberalism (in its classic Lockean emphasis on the supremacy of the property right) and fascism (structuralizing the property right into an hierarchical ordering of classes bound together in a military ethos). This is a tender moment, a feeling of proper recognition denied, as though valiant service to the corporate order (background chorus chanting “deregulation”) and sympathetic vibrations leading to the ascendancy of the military and intelligence communities were not exemplary presidential qualities in an advanced capitalist society.

The second act takes off from there. Obama, resolving to push ahead, sings about his double-barreled implementation of a Cold War strategy (what’s good for Russia is good for China, from ostracism to the opportunity for dismemberment and/or destruction). US capitalist penetration of Asian markets, here, is less significant than enlarging the American empire in order to head-off the Sino-Russian Eurasian trading bloc and its attendant POWER considerations in a world used to America’s unilateral dominance. In the hit number of the show, Obama rhapsodizes about his Pacific-first strategy as marking the turning point in geopolitical military-structural alignments, paving the way for a return of the US as the single center of world power.

The Philippines and, now, Malaysia, in the bag, joined by not-so-subtle urgings for Japan to rearm, the prospects appeared bright—quick scene changes to illustrate myriad settings for military bases—for a further transfer of “assets” closing in on China, accompanied by steadfast declarations of solidarity with friends and allies, all pointing to maintaining a state of tension as indispensable to fueling domestic bellicosity inclined toward a permanent state of war preparation and war itself. Once more, the chorus comes in: War, its preparation, the martial spirit (three-part harmony) reaches a crescendo on the word, “hegemony,” repeated solemnly, relentlessly, for ten minutes, as on the screen is projected the image of Obama, now styled Maximum Leader, being conferred the Nobel Peace Prize. We now return to today: Verily a Springtime for Obama, basking in the approval of such estimable elites as the New York Times, whose only criticism is that his so-called vacillation and indecisiveness (which it and critics alike sorely mistake) underestimates his consistency and thoroughness in favoring confrontation, a disdain for civil liberties, and the unswerving devotion to American Capitalism, an admirable carrier of the paradigm of global dominance.

Intermission: My New York Times Comment on the editorial, “President Obama and the World,” (May 4), pertinent to the discussion, yet left out of the Program Notes, follows:

The Times’s assessment is wholly uncritical, particularly where criticism is justified, notably, the geostrategic framework of isolating and containing, simultaneously, both Russia and China—the free pass here explained by your assumption that America by right should be pre-eminent in world affairs, i.e., exercise unilateral power to shape global political-economic-military powers, or simply, GLOBAL HEGEMONY. Nothing else satisfies the editorial board, and becomes the standard of leadership.

Obama has done much to disrupt international peace, the Pacific-first strategy, implemented (the “pivot”) by military means, is openly provocative of war; the reliance on CIA-JSOC paramilitary interventions on behalf of regime change, in at least a dozen countries (including support for the coup in Ukraine, embroiling the US and Russia in the first place), another example; most egregious and significant as a war crime, his personal authorization of targeted assassination.

Why is America’s reputation scorned in the world? Not because of putative weakness and indecision, but because of intervention, surveillance, eavesdropping (praise to Merkel for standing up to him). NYT, take off the blinkers. The US is engaged in the resumption of the Cold War, primarily because of its own DECLINE, the erosion of its industrial base, the overall financialization and militarization of capitalism at the expense of the social safety net and infrastructure—yes a multipolar world not to be feared.

Act 3: Springtime for America as well, in the form of alleged recovery from the 2008 financial crisis and the recession, is equally important to our script, because to prosecute a global offensive on the Forces of Darkness, Obama, if wanting to contain and isolate China, is still more persistent in his desire to humble Russia and destroy its influence. This requires a World Strategy which combines global hegemony with counterrevolution. (Like in Blue Man Group, with diagrams of plumbing flashed on the wall, designers bring out the intricacies of the interconnections between hegemony, regime change, drone warfare, cyberattacks, the whole mishmash of counterrevolution, with piercing lighting effects to underscore the majesty of US power.) Here the chorus line, dressed in camouflage, does a high-kick number. Entitled, “If you want to avoid criticism, keep the home fires burning,” they sing, in Brechtian voice, a paean on submission to Authority (thirty-second rising growl, “Authority”), Obama, now stage right, in a loud whisper, to the audience, adding, “Be submissive to the nation’s capitalist-military purpose and strategic assumptions,” a deliberate mouthful to obfuscate the deadly meaning. Yet, even these lyrics had to be changed after the fortieth performance, because of their unaccustomed honesty.

In fact, a joint task force, composed of DOJ, FBI, CIA, visited, at its request, the director and assembled cast after the fifty-eighth performance (earlier this spring) and threatened to close down the show on national security grounds. The charge: violation of the Espionage Act, because even though it was 100% American in content, its fidelity to raucous Patriotism acted to expose the ideas (and inadvertently, the record of Obama, starting with global hegemony) to ridicule. Fortunately, the relish for war and other giveaways of fascist intent were softened in tone and musical execution—and therefore, production still continues. Fortunately also, the number featuring a cadre of Economists was not removed. Led by a Paul Krugman look-alike, they marched in lockstep, top

hat and cane, bellowing out, to the tune of “No Business Like Show Business,” an Anthem of Reassurance: “This Is the Best of All Possible Worlds.” A real show-stopper, this was followed by the seemingly impromptu rendition of a song now making the charts, “What Makes America Great? War, Poverty, Underclass!”

Second intermission: My New York Times Comment, on the editorial, “A Better Economy, Still Far From Good,” (May 5), which, despite obvious pertinence, also did not make the Program Notes. Probably my fault because I implied The Times was throwing stardust on a lackluster record in order to pave the way for—while not recognizing—Obama’s fascistic, tripartite agenda: disregard for civil liberties, as in the Espionage Act prosecutions for whistleblowers; deregulation of the business and financial systems, as in making increased wealth-concentration now a given, with added tilting to the “defense” sector, integral to the militarization of capitalism; and the enlarged military budget in hand enjoying bipartisan support, an ambitious planning and program of intervention, market penetration, and global assertion of military prowess. At best, or worst, the belief in economic recovery is subjoined to foreign expansion and aggression, though the Comment is focused on the recovery issue:

I don’t question NYT’s sincerity, here, an argument for commonsense decency...but still myopic and panglossian. What improvement in employment? 238,000 vs. by your own admission, wages flat, “nearly 10 million unemployed people are looking for jobs, and MILLIONS MORE [caps mine] have become so disenchanted that they have given up on finding work altogether.” The latter are tossed out of the picture—yet it is that silent category (along with those still looking) that defines the real picture. From 6.7 to 6.3 is deceptive, even 6.7 being so—by your figures only 5/8ths “working or looking for work.”

Anything as per The Times’s usual to praise Obama and blame Republicans, when in fact both are EQUALLY culpable for an economy whose driving forces are privatization and militarism, Democrats as eager as Republicans in the pursuit of both.

Time for fighting back: restoring consumption through public works and vitalizing the social safety net. No, the New Deal, contrary to American thinking, was not communistic, nor Keynes, a stooge of Moscow. Crumbling infrastructure, extravagant waste with sophisticated agents of death, a fast emerging semipermanent UNDERCLASS, financial skullduggery beyond the novelist’s imagination, a Dreiserian cloud settling over the polity.

Yes, fight back, rather than lavish praise on what Brecht might term (although he didn’t use the phrase) POLITICAL GANGSTERISM, taking in the whole Washington financial-military scene. NYT can do better.

Finally, and most innovative, producers, director, writer, all agreed a final act, changing each week to reflect current issues of interest, hence improvisatory in character, should be added to provide context for “Springtime,” an updating of Odets to include a taste of the cultural scene which made these events, and the production itself, intelligible. In the week under review, the Sterling Affair became the cynosure of all eyes in the social media, television, the press—racial slurs by the owner of the L.A. Clippers, to be outright condemned as the contrasting darkness to the light of global hegemony. The setting becomes a Kafkaesque Court Room, each judge hurling thunderbolts of menace on the hapless, clueless defendant. (The actor was good in conveying that billions in real estate could lead to unguarded complacency.) The message: Sterling detracts from America’s

greatness and moral rectitude. He must be punished, else if such racial comments go unanswered, what will happen to humanitarian intervention, IMF austerity programs, drone assassination in the name of human rights? Here Lady Liberty rides out on a white horse, the scepter of freedom in her hand, joined by the chorus, now enlarged and standing solemnly at attention, the Obama-character coming forward to conduct the Star Spangled Banner, the audience now rising in unison—a paroxysm of patriotism, red, white, and blue confetti released from the ceiling. Curtain down, to thunderous applause.

What a moment! Yet, on leaving the theater, I confess to having had disturbing thoughts. NBA needs a scapegoat, but so does the society, in both cases—although neither one sees it that way—as testifying to a self-righteousness inherent in their treatment of blacks. The façade of democracy remained intact so long as it paid (NBA) or proved useful in foreign-policy moves directed to military supremacy, market expansion, and global ideological sway (society). Otherwise, once out of the limelight, blacks would be prime candidates for membership in the Underclass. Contrary to most, I therefore see L’Affaire Sterling as the moralistic orgasm of Liberalism, when, in fact, racism penetrates far deeper into the foundations and history of the polity, foundations which themselves have been left untouched by the presumed outrage (more a knee-jerk reaction) of the public. Comparable indignation does not greet Obama’s own partiality to megabanking and capitalism in general, which does far more to sustain racism in the form of disproportionate attendance in the underclass. Here my New York Times Comment, same date, without reference to fictitious identities, is to David Carr’s excellent article, “V. Stiviano Feeds Media Appetite for Scandal,” revealing a carnival of self-invention, wealth beyond imagination, matters perhaps far worse than the stupid ignorance of Sterling himself:

“...a perfect totem of our age.” Wonderful, fact over fiction. I have refused to follow the Sterling story, Carr’s article—excellent—the first I’ve read. Privacy, ha! Opportunism, everywhere. The super-rich, of course. But as one who fought in the civil rights struggle for years in the 1950s-60s, I cannot feel indignation, because the response to Sterling is so contrived, particularly when racism itself has structural foundations, in a nation over the top in its militarism (POTUS authorizing targeted assassination) and pressing the poor and unemployed into a semipermanent underclass (both exemplify far more obscene racism than Sterling’s gut ignorance and stupidity).

Cheers to Stiviano, demonstrating self-invention is the American Way. Rather than heap condemnation on the two, reserve some thought as to an America making them possible and enjoying the orgiastic spectacle. I take the distraction to be an exercise in self-righteousness on the part of the public and NBA, and a way of not thinking about the widening differentials in wealth and power along with an aggressive foreign policy looking actively for confrontation with Russia and China. Sterling is the villain, Obama, with his CIA-JSOC paramilitary operators for regime change, the exemplar of justice. Nonsense; look to ourselves, across the board, before conducting a media lynching of Sterling or lascivious thoughts about Stiviano.

MAY 19, 2014

## **Fascist Trifecta**

Sunday, May 18, the New York Times in refulgent mode signaling the glad tidings of liberal fascism: a plea for slight reduction in military appropriations, a daily dosage of Putin-bashing, and concern—“trigger warnings”—for the injured feelings of college students. None of these are per se interrelated, yet they help define the parameters of a Decaying Superpower whose sole position of global military, economic, ideological leadership is dissolving in the wake of internal rotting and a changing world-structure evolving into a multipolar power system, beginning with China, but taking in, still Russia, and now Brazil and emerging Third World industrializing nations, as well as Japan, EU acting as a bloc, etc.

Uncle Sam feels himself up against the wall, his emissary to the world (forget domestic society, hardly worth a glance when international prestige is at stake) growing itchy about mobilizing the military and intelligence communities, for positioning against China and Russia in a resurgent effort to get back and stay permanently on top. Obama, Air Force One, instead of red-white-and-blue jacket and top hat, will have to do, is pulling out all the stops, with the nation’s approval, and that of both major parties, toward military confrontation, banking on culture-war distractions at home to neutralize the Left and excite the Right to greater anger. As for global hegemony, there is no Left and Right, only bland consensus, the “Left” worthy of quotation marks for letting Obama preside over the trampling of human freedoms in every direction. Drone assassination carries the message of humanitarian generosity and concern, while massive surveillance echoes the Founding Fathers’ plea for freedom of thought. More room on Mount Rushmore?

California Chrome would be a distant fourth in the present horse race to totalitarianism. Take the military budget. In today’s NYT editorial, “the House Ducks on Defense,” (May 18), the complaint is made that wasteful projects—whether cost overruns or obsolete vehicles of death in the face of more potent weaponry—must give way, despite lobbyists and congressional proponents, to modernization of the military arsenal across the board. Not, ingrained war preparation is dangerous and pathological, only, get greater value for the money. Not just pathological, schizophrenic, because expenditures are discussed/celebrated wholly divorced from the critical examination of the geopolitical framework. In fact, they make the framework thinkable, then operational, then finally, in the hands of Obama, placed in a state of readiness—seen clearly in the Pacific-first strategy, now, with Ukraine, enlarged to include Russia as part of the unified priority.

The Times questions nonessentials, and is four-square in favor of the fundamentals: the unrestricted expansion of monopoly capitalism encased within a military structure and militaristic ethos. It of course is not alone. My Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

The military has sucked America, with bipartisan approval, into its capacious maw and is fast destroying democracy, itself a shadow, if that, of its hypothetical self. America, aka National Security State aka Fortress America so impregnated with militarism that it is willing to sacrifice the health and well-being of its people to an aggressive war machine not only in response to local interests but also the imperatives of global hegemony.

Not “campaign donors” etc but a morally corrupted society drives the war budget, with drone assassination, multiple interventions, paramilitary operations worldwide for regime change, all for what?! Why this social insanity? Is it because we know deep-down of US



decline both as unilateral global superpower AND political economy limping now because of a devouring selfishness, arrogance, and greed? Yes, to both.

And NYT—no, you don’t want to hear—is complicit, merely wanting more efficiency, more bang for the buck. Never a moral argument; only, Behemoth costs too much. Phase out some weapons systems, have base cuttings, No, the waste would “make weapons modernization impossible,” i.e. a still more LETHAL nuclear arsenal. Oh those “parochial interests,” when we far-sighted think-tank expert geostrategists Guardians of Freedom as responsible internationalists want only to “responsibly rebalance American military forces,” say, .5 trillion will do, not .6. Not spending, but the entire framework is flawed, yet NYT in full support.

Next we have Putin coveting the oil reserves in the territorial waters off Crimea, a power grab worthy of a chess master following, presumably, in the wake of Stalin, or, if you listen to Hillary, Hitler. Ukraine is simon-pure in the developing crisis. Yet it is difficult to buy the charge that Russia wants to reabsorb Ukraine and do to it what America and the EU had planned for Russia itself—not reabsorption so much as weakening and dismemberment. Ukraine has been brought into Cold War contestation, not because of Crimean oil but because of projecting NATO forces on the Russian border. As with NATO itself, the US is always the inspiring/energizing force in pushing for the containment policy, in this case, investment and trade penetration taking back seats to the sheer military-ideological urge to destroy what is still, in spite of capitalistic developments, an Alternative System. We have subsisted on anticommunism for so long that it is easy to perpetuate the hostility toward Russia as necessary for stoking American militarism (and thus obviating the need for democratic change at home). My Comment on William J. Broad’s NYT article, “In Taking Crimea, Putin Acquires a Sea of Fuel Reserves,” follows:

If the “Sea of Fuel Reserves” was so important—and obvious—the US should have taken that into account when it facilitated the COUP which toppled a democratically-elected government. Kiev may lament its underwater losses, and MIT-Jamestown experts may find matters deplorable, adding fuel (pardon the pun) to a US geostrategic confrontation with Russia that could lead to Global War, but that is what “blowback” is all about: namely, turn fascists loose in Western Ukraine (deniability on this count is absurd, given Svoboda, Right Sector, Bandera carryovers) and the prospect of NATO forces on Russia’s border—because of the coup—and you get Putin’s response.

A not unreasonable response, given Obama’s twin Russo-China strategy of encirclement, containment, isolation of both. Oil is the cherry on the sundae—it is doubtful Russia must have this source when its own internal riches are so great. Yes, NYT keep up the war-whoop, continue to demonize Putin, and, by not bearing down and scrutinizing the situation, actually abet the fascists and anti-Semites in the Kiev government, including looking the other way at the Odessa tragedy when demonstrators were burned to death in Trades Union House, those jumping from windows and surviving then chained to death by fascist thugs while the authorities looked on.

From a moral calculus, disregard of the enormity of that crime, for the sake of vilifying Putin, is outrageous.

Finally, where is the Left “when push comes to shove” (taking a favorite phrase of my dear friend Gabriel Kolko)? For in discussing the injured sensibilities of individuals, a theme emanating from radical feminist circles, but part of the larger sweep of political correctness, for which I have little sympathy, no doubt I shall be treading on the sensibilities of CP contributors/readers as well. The topic comes up in Jennifer Medina’s NYT article, “Warning: The Literary Canon Could Make Students Squirm,” (May 18), which discusses the move on campuses—UC, Santa Barbara, Oberlin, among others—to have course readings prefaced by trigger-warnings so as not to hurt the feelings of students exhibiting a range of concerns as to their identities and personal histories. “The Merchant of Venice,” alerting to anti-Semitism, “The Great Gatsby,” alerting to misogynistic violence, “Mrs. Dalloway,” alerting to suicide, and, of course, “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” alerting to racism—you get the picture. My objection: culture wars have served to break the back of radicalism. Yes, call me “Old Left,” but I think structured exploitation, wealth concentration, impoverishment, war, torture, intervention, regime change, markets, markets, markets, and the treachery of banking practices, far OUTWEIGH in importance, the slights and hurtful references and insinuations to students.

The two are not mutually exclusive, but when the latter crowds out the former, taking the Left’s eyes off the systemic wrongs and injustices based on the political-economic-military controls of the levers of power, which create the foundations for—and cannot be explained outside of reference to—domination (cultural as well as every which way) leading to the psychological and physical violation of the person, all, from a radical standpoint, is undermined and diminished. Why the fragility—when every day people are being murdered in the name of democracy? My Comment to the Medina article, same date, follows:

Liberal McCarthyism on the march. “Sensitivity” is fallacious coddling. Shall we, from the examples, throw out Shakespeare or F. Scott Fitzgerald. I say “liberal,” because classic radicalism is being destroyed through cultural issues and the culture war. There is militarism, poverty, formation of an underclass, a structure of power degrading to democratic governance—and instead, we have to be distracted by what, injured personal feelings, when the entire society is rotting at its core.

“Sensitivity” is one more evidence of the destruction of academic freedom. As a radical, I experienced “sensitivity” by right-wing colleagues and administrators at Yale—too much involved in civil-rights and antiwar activities. Out you go. (Early 1960s). Now it’s a vulgarized Left, drowning in personalism and self-indulgence, which will hound out faculty. Freedom of thought should NEVER be a Left-Right issue. It’s too important for that.

Now, hurt sensibilities takes the place of authentic class protest as the means for purging universities. Ugliness from the Left is no better than ugliness from the Right. I’m ashamed of Oberlin, where my son took a music degree. More, I’m ashamed of Liberalism, which, in its name, with no protest, mounts drone assassination, global aggression, regime change, sabotage of the social safety net at home, while whimpering students complain their feelings are hurt. Meanwhile, tens of thousands die at our hands.

MAY 21, 2014

**In Memoriam, Gabriel Kolko**

I called Gaby Friday morning (May 16), we chatted about old times, picketing on Boston Common in front of the State House on Friday afternoons, against nuclear testing and the absurd effort to move the state capitol to Framingham in the bedlam of an attack, he on a soap box, we marching around him, FBI informants taking our pictures as we passed, and then, on Saturday mornings, in Harvard Square, picketing in front of Woolworth's for lunch counter desegregation in the South, this in the period about 1957-61. As we talked, my wife Nancy was playing a Bach prelude and fugue in the living room, and I brought the phone in so Gaby could listen, Gaby who loved Bach (probably as much if not more than he loved Marx and Trotsky) and seemed transfixed, finally blurting out, "Bach was the greatest composer that ever lived."

That was Gaby, his recordings, his closeness to his wife Joyce, romantically, intellectually, politically inseparable. When Joyce died, Gaby's world darkened. And he had also a degenerative neurological disorder that was becoming progressively worse that would ultimately attack the brain. This was the Gaby of the last several years, after Joyce's death pretty much alone in Amsterdam, not what I knew of my friend (proud to consider him that, even through long lapses of our not seeing each other—far too long), a veritable Man Mountain of protest against and criticism of American ruling circles, most especially intervention, war, capitalist expansion, covert operations, crimes against humanity, at one point incisively focused on Vietnam, but even then, always thinking, shared by Joyce, of the global context of US operations and policy. (Although we were impressed by Harvard, not having been the prep school route, and all that it entailed, Gaby had Kissinger's number from the start, and the fledgling policy wonks anxious to prove their mettle as Strangelovians.)

I honestly have not kept up with all of his writings. He came by his Man Mountain qualities through a prodigious capacity for work *and* the absence of fear in going where his convictions and the evidence led him, leaving behind a body of writings, unified in development as he peeled away layer after layer of American power, inequality, foreign aggression, and yes, idiocy as well as criminality and mendacity at the top. His first book, *Wealth and Power in America*, did far more than Michael Harrington's sudden "discovery" of poverty to reveal the US's gross maldistribution of wealth, a topic held in suspension for some time since Progressivism and TNEC studies in the New Deal—a real breakthrough integrating bare statistics with radical analysis and interpretation. This was followed by *The Triumph of Conservatism*, perhaps my favorite, which defined and gave historical flesh and bones to the all-important framework of government-business interpenetration. Monopoly capital was significantly advanced via public policy, government protection not only of the business order, but the giant firms and banks, specifically by the elimination of competition, allowing business self-regulation through government auspices to favor their consolidation, writing their own ground rules in the process. Thus Gaby's damning indictment of Theodore Roosevelt as a "trust buster," and instead, by means of the Bureau of Corporations, the staunch friend of the House of Morgan. (TR incidentally could and did combine the consolidated economic base with the Battleship Navy, to strike out as a formidable world power.) Gaby's discussion of the Federal Reserve System, under Woodrow Wilson, laid out how the USG served to rationalize (in Max Weber's sense) the banking industry, the stabilization of financial power confirming US capitalism as a structure of concentrated wealth ever desirous of further economic expansion.

Then, of course, the foreign-policy studies, whether instinctively, I do not know, for we never discussed it, but however working his mental processes, Gaby was led from the domestic/internal foundations of American capitalism to its foreign complement—and soon obsession. I'm not sure whether he and Joyce used the phrase “global hegemony,” at least until after 1970, but his understanding of policy-direction was razor sharp, so much so that in *The Politics of War*, a magnificent volume on World War II, which, unlike practically all other historical works of the conflict, went into the nuts-and-bolts of American Empire as actually evolving through the course of the war itself—and, as planning looked ahead to the postwar period, at the expense of the Allies (as dismembering the British Empire for purposes of achieving American trade and investment opportunities). In a way, Bretton Woods was as important to FDR as Yalta, Gaby placing FDR's own capitalistic realpolitik into play (and insufficiently followed through by others). This was followed by *The Limits of Power*, with Joyce, which, among other things, worked through the intricacies of currency-and-trade domination on a world basis.

There is much more, his writings on Vietnam in particular, but let me stop this account with a Kolko specialty: the short, tight analysis covering a huge accumulation of evidence, words if not chiseled in stone then at least the pounding that came from the early days on the soapbox. I have in mind, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*, which has for its dedication what I think best reveals Gaby's own heart and mind:

*To the victims  
Those who resist,  
And to the future!*

The scholar and activist, yes, but the man also—his devotion to Joyce, their strength in solidarity with each other, in the face of the usual, instead of being celebrated for his work, spiteful denigration by academics on-the-make; his love of Bach, and baroque music in general (also early music); and as we talked on the phone last Friday, when I told him about the Gilmore Piano Festival in Kalamazoo weeks ago, he said, “Oh, yes, Michigan. Norm, did you ever search for the morel mushrooms, they're famous in Michigan.” Gaby, the mycophile. We all shall miss you terribly, rest in peace.

MAY 22, 2014

**Wanted! Obama**

It is as though Edward Snowden's disclosures had never been made, or the US practices in themselves perpetrated. Yet AG Holder with all the majesty of office declares China engaged in criminal economic espionage against America, even DOJ issuing “wanted” posters, pictures and names, of five army officers to stand trial in Pennsylvania for cyberattacks on US corporations and the Steelworkers' Union. More like it would be, the International Criminal Court issuing an Obama “wanted” poster for war crimes that include intervention, regime change, and assassination, and the World Trade Organization (if it were not dominated already by the US) for the exact kind of espionage Holder charges against China. If we are to be symmetrical, how about a Beijing court issuing subpoenas, accompanied by “wanted” posters for five members of OTNS (Obama Team National Security), say, Clapper, Rice, Comey, Brennan, and Dempsey? The chance of US honoring the request for the extradition of its five, is about as slim as China honoring the request for

extraditing, though at a lower functional level in policy making and execution, its five—perhaps selected at random, unless the US has hacked into the computers of, or placed informants in (or both)—the People’s Liberation Army (PLA Unit61398).

But that’s just the point. AG Holder, in announcing, as Spencer Ackerman and Jonathan Kaiman report in *The Guardian* (May 20), that “the US for the first time would seek to bring officials of a foreign government to the US to face charges of infiltrating American computer networks to steal data beneficial to US trade competitors,” can’t be serious about China’s compliance with his order. Nor printing up and distributing “wanted” posters, a la the Wild West, with the faces of each and banner headline trumpeting charges—both steps calculated to antagonize the Chinese government and advance the administration’s plan of confrontation, bordering, with Obama’s Pacific-first strategy, on military engagement still at this point short of all-out war.

The cyberwarfare issue, as Holder and DOJ have presented it, is a farce. He and the Justice Department are carrying water for the military, edging ever closer to limited armed conflict, with the growing risk of going nuclear. Obama, on his Pacific Rim tour, offered support to Japan over some rocky islands and encouraged its rearmament; he also, among other activities, arranged for joint maneuvers with the Philippines. Like the “wanted” posters, these steps were designedly provocative to draw China into the US power orbit, similar to the way the US has drawn Russia into the combined power orbit of the US, NATO, and the EU over Ukraine. Hence Obama is using cyber espionage, which is broadly construed to include governmental, military, and economic targets, and of which America’s military and intelligence communities are clear masters, as a stalking horse for armed intervention or at least the opportunity for facing down China. The problem is, the US is playing with the wrong party—a foolhardy, disastrous, every-which-way dumb, ploy.

Holder’s charge of cyberwarfare against China, “The range of trade secrets...stolen...is significant and demands an aggressive response,” can only be understood in the context of America’s geopolitical framework on a global basis, in which China replaces Russia as the enemy of the first magnitude, i.e., that which calls for a total response, synthesizing military and economic elements in the containment, isolation, and drastic reduction of power of China. Obama’s “pivot,” perhaps the only transparent thing left in American government, is a multipronged strategy, calculated to antagonize China and otherwise readjust global structural arrangements to ensure the America’s resumption of uncontested world supremacy. The military alliances firmed up in the recent trip, encouragement of Japanese rearmament, the endeavor to stir up further friction between South and North Korea, all appear ongoing—yet with it we have the other prong, the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), not merely market penetration, but the militarization of trade because it is so closely identified with the military dimension of policy.

Despite the Holder accusations, the Chinese leadership appears to be keeping its cool, like Putin also has with respect to Ukraine, a response which suggests the more long-term unification of interests of the two nations (confirmed by Putin’s two-day visit to Shanghai, where he and Xi completed a contract for Gazprom’s supply of natural gas to China for thirty years). US antagonism toward China has facilitated blowback on a grand scale, primarily here, bringing together Russia and China after decades of political-ideological conflict between Stalin and Mao, making possible what America strongly fears, a Eurasian trading bloc which helps to create an independent power center both challenging US unilateral global dominance and thereby laying the groundwork for what I have been terming a multipolar world power system. No, five “wanted” posters did not

achieve this result; the dynamics of confrontation were long in coming given the realities of shifting political economies' strengths and performance, and more, the changing global architecture of economic development, an industrializing Third World and more difficult to characterize emergences to significant power in their own right (Brazil, India, etc.). A hubristic US was, by its own actions, set for a come-uppance. How else, e.g., has China succeeded so well in Africa and Latin America in natural-resources investment and extraction, as well as trade itself? The "wanted" posters merely symbolize the unreality of America's perception of the world, which is slowly and surely passing it by.

Therefore, the bellicosity. That Putin and Xi are going about their business (a bad pun, but, as the gas deal shows, highly accurate), this positively infuriates Obama, Congress, and the Military, a troika of smart aleck-ness grounded in the use of commercial-financial pressures, intervention, bullying, and always in reserve an overwhelming intimidating military presence in the world. That, however, is no longer sufficient in paving the way for and ensuring the success of unilateralism. Putin and Xi's calmness in response to US geopolitical assertions of power seems to be meeting with wider approval of the world community, a condition America is loathe to accept, and perhaps cannot even see. Instead, it banks on an unstated psychological principle of its own making: make US unilateralism obvious, flaunt it so that domination takes on the character of a self-fulfilling prophesy; the tougher the posture and its appearance of toughness, presumably the more respect it engenders.

But this armchair psychology sits on a nuclear stockpile, which helps to make understandable the arrogance of charging China with cyberspying when America has set the gold standard—NSA surveillance which practically requires a new arithmetic of scale and scope, the main stem for reaching out to sabotage, eavesdrop, transmit viruses, all in the name of national security and counterterrorism. Apropos of the boldness of Holder's move, the Guardian reporters write, "While suspicions about government sponsorship of corporate data theft have swirled around China for years, never before has the US formally accused officials from China, or any other government, of involvement." Why, now? I surmise, because the perhaps still unconscious realization of America's decline (not only globally, in terms of power, but internally, with the diminished manufacturing base, crumbling infrastructure, paralysis in solving all manner of problems, from policies contrived to create and maintain an underclass to urban decay to alienation and fragmentation defining social relations and the national mood) is forcing the imperialist-military hand mobilized in now-or-never mode. In the case of China, displacing Russia as Main Adversary in a re-charged Cold War, the Washington mentality is that of, strike while the iron is hot, the iron in this case being aircraft carrier groups and long-range bombers in position, along with troop movements, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, perhaps Malaysia, elsewhere, wherever encirclement can be made to take hold.

Modesty, let alone even-handed justice, has no place in calculations about cyberwarfare, the US itself not above conducting economic espionage. For as Ackerman and Kaiman write: "Documents leaked by Edward Snowden showed the NSA targeted the Brazilian oil firm Petrobras, even as the NSA insisted that its Defense Department parent 'does not engage in economic espionage in any domain, including cyber,' in a statement to the Washington Post." Important here is not the Pentagon and NSA's obvious fabrication, a denial contradicted by its own documents, but the emphasis on economic espionage as somehow different, and thus excusable and legitimate for that reason, from military and intelligence espionage. US cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, FBI

infiltration of hackers' groups seeking recruits for a wide range of illegal activities, even though, and especially though, having the Bureau's support, in which criminal prosecutions are threatened to group members in order to "turn" them as spies, these are drops in the larger ocean of massive surveillance of the American people, signifying the wholesale repudiation and implicit condemnation of civil liberties hardly bespeaking clean hands in the indictment of China's practices. In his press conference last Monday (May 12) Holder falls back on the platitude, "all nations are engaged in intelligence gathering," this to then isolate economic espionage as a species of a different order, thereby "mak[ing] this case different."

Here Keith Bradsher's article in the New York Times, "For U.S. Companies That Challenge China, the Risk of Digital Reprisal," (May 20), indicates what America is up against, not reciprocal foul play, so much as a demand for recantation (the US record of cyber spying) and backing down. Thus, responding to DOJ's indictment the Chinese government—here the defense ministry, in a news release—threw the charges back in America's face, Tuesday (May 13): "China demands that the U.S. give it a clear explanation of its cybertheft, bugging and monitoring activities, and immediately stop such activity." Other nations are not so blunt. Sino-American relations, as evidenced, are moving down a slippery slope. (America's hurt feelings? Unlikely, for the US is impervious to insult, let alone pleas to cease activities, whether carpet-bombing in jungle areas or "shock-and-awe" demonstrations in urban ones.) Putin's visit to China in the last two days, by serving to ease long-standing tensions between the two powers, applies the grease to make that slope even more slippery—and US military behavior potentially more dangerous.

Jane Perlez's NYT article, "China and Russia Reach 30-Year Gas Deal," (May 21), in an opening sentence, captures the changing world political landscape (for The Times, a perhaps unfortunate development, for the rest of the world, outside the US power orbit, at the very least a breath of fresh air): "China and Russia signed a \$400 billion gas deal on Wednesday, giving Moscow a megamarket for its leading export and linking two major powers that, despite a rocky history of alliances and rivalries, have drawn closer to counter the clout of the United States and Europe." What should be said beyond the obvious consequences of a rapprochement, both for strengthening China's industrial capacity and partially satisfying its energy needs, as well as putting a solid floor underneath a Eurasian trading bloc, is that Russia itself is no longer dependent on Europe as the market for its leading product. Win-win for the multipolar global power configuration. Perlez correctly notes that Ukraine brought China and Russia together: "The impetus to complete the gas deal, which has been talked about as a game-changing accord for more than a decade, finally came together after the Ukrainian crisis forced Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, to urgently seek an alternative to Europe, Moscow's main energy market, which slapped sanctions on Russia and sought ways to reduce its dependence on Russian energy." Game-changer, too, just in the sheer size and economic stimulus of the project, calling "for the construction of pipelines and other infrastructure that will require tens of billions of dollars in investment."

I can hear US policy elites/wonks gnashing their teeth, as Strobe Talbott, president of Brookings and chair of Kerry's Foreign Policy Advisory Board, said: "The Sino-Soviet rift that brought the two countries to the brink of nuclear war in the '60s has been healed rather dramatically." Both sides deplored US military actions in Iraq, etc., and its unilateralism in general, and Xi, fully cognizant of Obama's Pacific-First strategy, including the "pivot" sending military "assets" to the region, a context for China's viewing Japanese rearmament and now, as Perlez writes, "the hard line

on cybertheft,” together make their coming together plausible and actual. Blowback, certainly, when intervention signals hegemony, and divide-and-conquer no longer works, leaving American unilateralism stripped bare to mean what it says, one party, here, in the business of domination. Alone. Increasingly resented. Set in its ways, as though a deterministic logic takes hold defining the mentalset—and the bipartisan foreign as well as domestic policy.

Washington’s “wanted” posters, deeply humiliating to China, and done for that reason, is one more straw ready to ignite in a possible global conflagration. Trade actually is front and center, though not for its own sake, as it is for power considerations having strategic and political import. Bradsher again, on US fears of retaliation for its own attacks: “If China has begun retaliating against companies that seek the enforcement of free trade rules, [writes a think-tank advocate for American business, in Hong Kong] as the indictment suggests, that could allow Beijing to begin creating an international trading system in which China has more latitude to pursue its own policies.” Strictly verboten in the American paradigm of global power. Thus we see a stand-off in the making, cyberwarfare itself the plaything of larger forces at work. How, then, does America respond to a nation, fast overtaking it in industrial production and, as in Africa and Latin America, in foreign investment? Under Obama, and thus far the leading candidates of both major parties, the prognosis is not good—for the earth, for humanity, and for Americans ourselves.

My New York Times Comment on Keith Bradsher’s article follows, same date:

Too ludicrous for words. The US engages in massive surveillance at home, eavesdropping on foreign leaders, and, as NYT recently revealed, employs the FBI to gather informers in order to launch cyberattacks. Whoa, more than the pot calling the kettle black, the US stands as hypocrite #1 on this issue of cyberspying. Then to have the chutzpah to offer a fatuous distinction in justifying its own activities—the US “takes the position that it has been spying to gather military, political and economic intelligence...fundamentally different from and less of an intrusion on civil liberties than spying to gain a commercial advantage”—takes the cake.

Spying is spying. Period. Only in the US is “commercial advantage” seen as a more heinous crime than “gather[ing] military, political and economic intelligence.” What this tells me is that the US perceives all too clearly its own DECLINE as a political-economic-ideological power, and hence, is turning to increased MILITARY action to maintain—a losing cause in a now multipolar world—its unilateral global hegemony. Why can’t it live gracefully as a global citizen, rather than engaging in war, intervention, regime change (Ukraine), etc.?

Is it because of an historical tendency—inscribed in the nation’s DNA—toward conquest, xenophobia, racism—combined with the fetishism of/for technology? Snowden deserves a place on Mt. Rushmore, Obama, Holder, Clapper, Brennan, not even the base camp.

MAY 23, 2014

### **Surveillance, Cyberspying, and the Fig Leaf of Democracy**

NSA deservedly takes its place with the CIA (like the New Deal in one respect, there are a number of agencies in the alphabet soup, here FBI, JSOC, FISAC, DNI, etc. etc. stand ready for



admission into the Cathedral of Repression—let's add, POTUS) at the foundations of the internal subversion of American democracy, such as it is, with its long history of racism, xenophobia, intervention, and wealth-inequality, already for centuries adding up to a modification or qualification of the uncritical use of the term. Like billboards on the highway for painless dentistry, the liberalization of fascism in America does not change substance and structure, only perception of substance and structure. The anesthetic (a cocktail of sport, consumerism, patriotism from every quarter, a cowardly MSM) places the patient—us, you and me—in a state of narcotization, as traditional liberties, more, the rule of law itself, are being gradually whittled away. Waking up, we feel nothing has changed, as meanwhile our intimate lives are placed on the table (slab?) for inspection and examination of “subversive” thinking and association.

From the late-18th century Alien and Sedition Acts through the Palmer Red Raids through McCarthyism and HUAC, right up to now, the continuum of thought control has been inscribed in the nation's DNA, only today, having by now become the normalization of repression, we pay little or no heed. Jim Clapper is our Joe McCarthy, but for that matter, so is Barack Obama, John Brennan, and the whole merry band of White House nutcakes, except that they are not nuts, they're very efficient and methodical, and it is we who are nuts for letting them get away with stealing our freedoms.

Methodical grounding down of the political consciousness of all that counts, or should count: peace, social justice, equality, transparency of government, the fearless conduct of the press, the simple right to be different in one's life from popular and governing norms. I once related, in a CounterPunch article, “Education of a (Sometime) Radical,” my conversation with Isaac Deutscher, celebrating my passing my “generals” in Am Civ at Harvard, sitting with him on a couch in our two-room apartment in the Boston suburbs, he, among the most distinguished historians and biographers of the 20th century, and he related to me his current impressions of America, circa 1959-60. Coming from England, he was working at Houghton off Harvard Yard on the biography, probably of Trotsky, I don't remember, whose Papers were there. Everyone was cordial.

Known throughout the academic and literary world as sympathetic to Marx and Marxism, he was surprised at the reception, surprised yet wary. For when he came to Houghton years before, to work on (probably) the Stalin biography, he was treated like the carrier of a virulent disease. Not cordiality, more like contempt and fear. “But you know,” he said, “I found the present more frightening, disturbing” (rough paraphrase after 55 years—even to remember shows, especially with my poor memory, the impression he made on me), because now the fear, the spirit of anticommunism, i.e., red-baiting, often having little to do with communism one way or the other, and instead, racial justice, peace, opposition to the Cold War, labor rights, support of progressive candidates (yes, like Henry Wallace and Claude Pepper, they were still around) had gone underground, so completely internalized by the society, its institutions, educational system from top to bottom, the everyday Joe as well as in the board room, that the LIMITS on one's thought and action were completely accepted, a silent interior wall of restraint.

We're there today, hardly a murmur over the degradation of civil liberties. Massive surveillance becomes standard operating procedure. Now, the National Security State. Orwell's Big Brother is now, presumably, an avuncular distant relative, ready for assisted living. Deutscher was not fooled. Repression wearing a liberal face (if even that) is still repression. The Obama smile, in this case, hides a war apparatus hungry for the kill, and a “defense” budget to match. My point: the

indictment of China for cyberespionage, neglecting all questions of America's disproportionately heavier involvement in such activities, is PHONY, not only a way to hide America's record, but also what I termed a "stalking horse" to suck China into a vortex of mutual recriminations raising the temperature of the American public to a boiling point, so as to make armed conflict with China thinkable—and, as has already started, the deployment of armed forces, naval power, the whole gamut of weaponry options to the Pacific.

Edward Wong's New York Times article, "U.S. Case Offers Glimpse Into China's Hacker Army," (May 23), the title somewhat loaded (for would we call NSA America's Hacker Army?), and leaving unsaid that we could not get, until, of course, Edward Snowden, even a "glimpse" into Washington's nether world of cyberspying, much less the dimensions of domestic surveillance and foreign eavesdropping, nonetheless imparts, albeit one-sided, some interesting information. Wong discusses the five individuals on DOJ's "Wanted" Posters, each under indictment by a Pennsylvania grand jury for hacking "the computers of prominent American companies to steal commercial secrets, presumably for the benefit of Chinese companies."

"China's hacking culture," he writes, "is a complex mosaic of shifting motivations, employers and allegiances," the hackers "trained at universities run by the People's Liberation Army," many of whom are free-lance operators after working hours. This part should obviously not be fudged, despite that his informants are think-tank and Council of Foreign Relations sources, for PLA involvement and an extensive hacking culture are both present in China.

However, Wong also makes the point, though not pursuing it further, that USG makes an arbitrary (he doesn't call it that) distinction, which it uses to hide and justify the framework for its own cyberspying (which he also ignores): "The Obama administration makes a distinction between hacking to protect national security, which it calls fair play, and hacking to obtain trade secrets that would give an edge to corporations, which it says is illegal. China and other nations accuse the United States of being the biggest perpetrator of both kinds of espionage."

I say Amen to the latter, except that in fact the fetishism of National Security allows the US to do both as though a unified field of permissible activity. Worshipping the god of national security throws a mantle over the corporation per se, not only needful for national security, but also what makes America distinctive, good, benign—capitalism, which must enjoy the full protection of the State. Following Chinese hackers has become an American cottage industry, as Wong is good enough to list several private contractors, e.g., FireEye, who have a hand in the game. What this says of the accuracy of the charges made, remains to be determined.

My New York Times Comment on Wong's article, same date, follows:

Thank you Mr. Wong for the China dimension; now, to balance the account, I should like The Times to examine US activities. Problem: NYT does not seek balance, and rather gives Obama favored treatment; how compare China's record with the present massive surveillance of NSA? What importance attaches to US eavesdropping of foreign leaders, or FBI use of informants for cyberspying? Fair is fair. US wanted posters for Chinese hackers (assuming the charges are valid) would merit, conversely, an International Criminal Court indictment of Obama for war crimes, starting with targeted assassination, regime change, covert operations, rendition, torture—the list goes on, far more egregious practices than charged against China.

The whole cyber dispute between the US and China, especially given the American record, is a sham, i.e., pretext for moving closer to outright military confrontation with China. Why else the “pivot,” the whole Pacific-first strategy, along with TPP, and naval-and-air power to the region? The US by Obama’s encirclement (e.g., via military alliances, joint-maneuvers, increased troop presence, etc.) is a threat to world peace. China however will not be intimidated. Nor will the world, outside of the US’s immediate power orbit, sit still. Open condemnation is not far behind, if not already raised, and the clumsiness of US hegemonic moves will hardly halt the formation of a Eurasian trading bloc, the thing America wants to prevent yet by its actions fosters.

Then we have, bless their hearts, The Times editorial board’s thoughts, usually in disconnect from the even gingerly reporting of its investigative reporters, the editorial entitled, “A Surveillance Bill That Falls Short,” (May 23), which references a House bill “to curtail the government’s abusive surveillance practices” the Times itself admits is inadequate. Here we see Establishment Centrist teetering on the brink, fearing that basic criticism would compromise the paper’s reputation for “objective” (read, pro-administration) reporting. Yet, be thankful for small openings. The editorial states, “Unfortunately, the bill passed by the House on Thursday [May 22] falls far short of those promises, and does not live up to its title, the U.S.A. Freedom Act.” (With a title like that, one instinctively runs for cover.) It continues: “Because of last-minute pressure from a recalcitrant Obama administration, the bill contains loopholes that dilute the strong restrictions in an earlier version, potentially allowing the spy agencies to continue much of their phone-data collection.” A rare phrase, “a recalcitrant Obama administration,” which should be savored—before it is retracted, or, as here, compromised by The Times’s own improvements.

Thus, “The bill moves the collection of phone data from the government to the phone companies, where it belongs.” But the collection continues. Thus again, “It limits the ability of the National Security Agency to request calling records more than two contacts away from a terrorism suspect...” Two contacts too many, an already wide connective chain scooping in others. Finally, “It requires that opinions or orders from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court be made public, unless they would clearly expose intelligence sources or harm national security. Even then, summaries of the opinions would have to be provided.” Given the Court’s sordid record, e.g., no adversarial procedure allowed, why not abolish rather than gussy up this obnoxious judicial instrument? Harming national security: a capacious umbrella under which to hide all manner of abuses. Redaction, thy name is holy.

The Times, after all, has something of a conscience, for in looking at a version of the bill that this one replaced, it admits that “after those committee votes, administration officials went behind closed doors and demanded changes. The new bill adds more search terms, and makes it clear that the list is no longer limited.” Obama vs. civil liberties, there NYT should go. Bravo, The Times persists: “The changes demanded by the White House [i.e., Obama] would also weaken the provision allowing Internet companies to report how often the government made requests of their data.... And the role of declassifying court decisions would go from the attorney general to the director of national intelligence, the last person who should do it.” Good, but not good enough, the difference between Holder and Clapper being negligible.

Still, on this legislation, The Times instinctively may have sensed that America—thank you, all three branches of government, each making its own special contribution—is moving almost ineluctably to fascism. My Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

Finally The Times at least partially concedes Obama's savage record on civil liberties, and even then, in still allowing for bulk data collections, simply shifts location from government to phone companies. Not good enough. How say, "Because of last-minute pressure from a recalcitrant Obama administration, the [House] bill contains loopholes..." and still have any sort of confidence Obama will do right? Again, "The changes demanded by the White House would also weaken the provision allowing Internet companies...", yet no outright condemnation in face of the resultant emasculation.

Why keep up the charade? Why defend the abrogation of civil liberties? Why carry water for a POTUS whose record, as in denying habeas corpus rights to detainees, along with the authorization of the massive surveillance of the American people in the first place, and the targeted ASSASSINATION of individuals, including US citizens, without charges, counsel, etc., merits the contempt of all who value (if there are still some of us) traditional principles of the rule of law.

By his actions, Obama is lawless. The Times here prettifies a critique by avoiding the center of power responsible for the excesses committed.

Instructive reply (reaction of NYT reader to criticism of USG and Obama) to my comment, name deleted, same date:

NY Times with the help of Mr. Snowden has been quite prolific in exposing US activities.

Now if Mr. Snowden or others could expose the surveillance efforts of China, then we could compare the efforts of the two countries.

It could be that the Chinese at this point don't lack the desire but do lack the technology.

My reply to the reply (illustrative of need to clarify issues), same date:

Rita thanks for your reply, but you evade the challenge, shifting to China while ignoring US behavior. Cyberwarfare is a means to an end, not an end. Face—and here answer—the criticism directed to Obama's record and present practices. Global hegemony is not a catchphrase, but an accurate description of a world posture claiming unilateral dominance—military, political, economic, ideological. Even TPP deserves analysis, rather than implied dismissal. I'm afraid the US is embarked on a fascist course under liberal auspices: liberal fascism, starting with massive surveillance of the American people.

Rita, if you value the rule of law, Obama is not worth defending or apologizing for—whatever might be said about China's role in cyberespionage. Obama can't claim he's protecting us when his and USG's practices are still worse. You invoke Snowden, but fail to credit the seriousness of his revelations. I too would like to see the light turned on China, but that does not excuse US conduct. Let's start with drone assassination, those clubby Tuesday evening meetings replete with hit lists, national security advisers complicit in torture and a POTUS who personally authorizes assassination. And then go on from there.

MAY 26, 2014

## **Spiff Up the War Graves**

Spiff up the war memorials, war graves, war stories, no, spiff up WAR itself, the underlying purpose, in the midst of parades, weenie roasts, and other festivities, though people have only subliminally acted out the celebratory function, for affirming US global hegemony and a lockstep Patriotism designed to stifle criticism of and dissent over America's flagrant expansion of military power in shaping a world system patterned after its own imperative need for economic-ideological supremacy. Memorial Day Weekend (even Decoration Day no longer has sufficient bite to keep the citizens in accommodating mood to accept its government's war crimes) rivets attention on Family and Baseball as the good-natured aspect of rallying the folk to the side of conquest. In town parks (as in Lansing MI) around the country, the holiday is dedicated to our Armed Forces, our Brave Warriors, protecting the homeland from destruction by unnamed (usually) forces, an exercise in fill-in-the-blank conjuring threats from Russia, China, Venezuela, Yemen, wherever the White House-Pentagon propaganda mill can generate interest.

As bad as all that? Actually, worse. The political discourse now going around portrays Obama as weak, not giving confidence and support to Allies and Friends in the face of Adversaries out there, "out there" covering the entire globe including, if massive surveillance of the American people be our guide, the US itself. No one is immune to the blandishments of Terror. Hence, suspect everyone. NSA, scoop up every scrap of "information"—the scope continues to expand and be redefined, starting from the Internet and telephonic communication—so that privacy is pummeled into the ground, no longer a right, and instead, like the Fifth Amendment of the postwar era, presumably the refuge of traitors, terrorists, and those who would harm us.

Why political discourse portraying Obama as weak, indecisive, an advocate for peace? Two obvious points: first, the LIE is cultivated by Obama himself, his alter ego, Rhodes, Democrats at large wrapped as a whole in the mantle of Liberalism, either to distract from the actual Obama record of intervention, constant pressure on China and Russia, targeted assassination, cyberwarfare, paramilitary subversion of other nations, embargoes, military exercises, the entire gamut of Cold War aggressiveness—and then some, and/or second (for the two work in tandem, feeding on and facilitating one another) Obama's critics, assuming their sincerity, are so far to the Right, so viciously eager to assert American power, that Obama, himself doing the same, comes out smelling like a rose. Republicans need the portrayal of Obama as unsteady at the helm both to stiffen the will of the people and legitimate their protofascism edging toward outright expression, and the Democrats need the Republicans, as, a half-step if that much behind, gaining some cover while pursuing the same hegemonic goals abroad and silencing of dissent at home.

Obama is the perfect Janus-faced Maximum Leader, speak Liberalism (itself coded to cosmeticize Reaction), and sotto voce, give full support to the military and intelligence communities, capitalist upper groups foursquare behind them standing in the wings, the industrial infrastructure of Defense, and preening at the top, national security advisers whispering in his ear the lovelies of rapine, destruction, national greatness. OWS may fume at the 1%-99% dichotomy of the body politic; unfortunately, this is more menacing, as is Obama, because representing the structuralization of war as integral to capitalist advancement. Here the so-called 99% has become an exercise in self-debasement by largely going along with the geopolitical-military SCAM, wallowing in a preferred false consciousness, scrambling for the crumbs of an ubiquitous consumerism, rather

than either face down the phonies qua moral monsters or give up the promised goodies held to be a validation of Exceptionalism (aka American world superiority).

Perhaps not coincidentally, two articles appeared in the New York Times smack dab in the middle of the Memorial Day Weekend, Mark Landler, “Obama to Detail a Broader Foreign Policy Agenda,” anticipating his speech at West Point on Wednesday, and looking to the same occasion, David Sanger, “Deterrence Revisited,” Sanger the new James Reston of The Times, an authoritative voice of the Administration and point-man for the Pentagon. Let’s consider Sanger’s first (both May 25) because the more conceptual—and hence revealing—of the two. Landler then fills in the shadings of political discourse. Together they fix in time for us Obama’s at-bottom militarism, although the furthest from their minds.

Sanger begins on a solemn note (as though Kennan were announcing a new theorem): “The graduation exercises at West Point have long been a moment for American presidents to offer midcourse adjustments—or something more radical—in their strategies for dealing with foreign adversaries.” Unlike Landler, who refers to Russia and China, Sanger, consistent with his lofty tone and the universal character of the vision, uses “adversaries” unspecified, countless times in his article. Yet the midcourse adjustment is hardly that, more of the same with the assistance of Rhodes’s soothing rhetoric. It is Sanger who is deceived or wishes to parrot the party line.

And what a line! Obama seeks peace, peace above all, nothing but peace. Bush’s pre-emption strategy (strike first, don’t ask questions) had been presented at West Point earlier. Now, Obama’s turn: When he appears there, “he will face a far different challenge: convincing the world that American willingness to deter aggressors lives on, even in a post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan era when neither the president nor the nation has much appetite for engaging in direct confrontations overseas. From Libya in 2011 to Syria for the past three years and Ukraine in recent months, Mr. Obama has repeatedly assured Americans that he understands—and shares—the national mood.” Staggering presumption this, that the Big Lie can be hidden, as is the practice, through asserting the opposite.

“American willingness to deter aggressors”—what aggression, except America’s own? And post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan, as if the US DETERRED aggression in these wars of its own creation. And “convincing the world,” for Sanger, is the test of leadership, not only Obama’s, but America’s, exemplified through toughness, an unwavering commitment and willingness to act on it, of the whole bit: global leadership, Exceptionalism, the divine right of hegemony. If not, the world order will collapse, and America betray friends and allies and its place in history as the bulwark against all challenges to that World Order, which is defined as the stabilization of international capitalism, and within it America’s unilateral preeminence.

Whether Obama’s or the nation’s “appetite for engaging in direct confrontations overseas” is lagging or surfeited, is hardly a matter of doubt, as in the dangerous geostrategic encirclement, containment, and isolation of China via the Pacific-first strategy and the accompanying Trans-Pacific Partnership, not to say, using his own example, being instrumental in staging the coup in Ukraine. Sanger’s examples—Libya, Syria, Ukraine—are ludicrous in support of his argument. Nor do Obama and the nation SHARE a conviction for peace; rather, for both, securing victory through techno-superior weaponry. Yet, Sanger betrays nagging doubts. What if Obama and the nation are losing their appetite for confrontation, and horror of horrors, losing face in the world and all that

presumably implies about stopping aggression? Here (solicitude for Obama as misconstrued), he writes: “But even inside the Obama administration some senior officials worry about the global perception that Mr. Obama has let the pendulum swing too far, creating space for American adversaries and assorted strongmen to challenge, or ignore, the rules of global order the president says he wants to restore. In short, they don’t fear the prospect of American action the way they might have in past eras.” Sanger conflicted, however, is not the point. We see in microcosm the unapologetic framework of the Cold War—Obama’s national security advisers, assuredly, but both Sanger and Obama as well, “the pendulum swing[ing] too far,” dropping our guard against the Enemy, and “the rules of global order,” US-defined ground rules for market penetration, investments, currency valuations, above all, an inadmissibility of socialism and/or insurgent democratization, a world therefore stabilized on the principle of counterrevolution.

If Obama falls short of maintaining that world, he deserves criticism. Sanger turns the screws, citing Kerry’s Yale commencement address stating that the US must avoid “an excess of isolationism,” Laurent Fabius, France’s foreign minister, echoing the sentiment, chastises Obama for “backing away from a military strike” on Syria, and an unnamed “top Southeast Asian official, accusing him of being soft on China. Where is all this leading? In essence, toughen up, Mr. Obama (the quintessential NYT position): “Deterrence, of course, is all about the perception of power. It hinges on convincing adversaries that, with force, guile or economic isolation, you can make them [Putin and Ji ?] think twice about acting against American interests.” Unabashed Cold War thinking, even the words. And when Sanger writes, “Whatever one’s view of the morality of using drones,” for after all this “wiped out Al Qaeda’s central command,” ditto, “the cyberstrikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities,” my inclination is to run for cover. He puts Obama on the pedestal above the petty snarling of critics: “And of course there was the Navy SEAL mission to kill Osama bin Laden three years ago; the primary mission was to settle scores with the most wanted terrorist on the planet, but the secondary effect was to amplify the message that if you attacked the United States sooner or later you would be hunted down.”

Happy Memorial Day Weekend; it would be hard to beat that, and Landler’s article is the launch in the wake of the battleship. He writes: “President Obama, seeking to answer criticism that he has forsaken America’s leadership role, plans to lay out a retooled foreign-policy agenda on Wednesday that could deepen the nation’s involvement in Syria but would still steer clear of major military conflicts.” Again, “forsaken,” as though withdrawing from what is *prima facie* right, unilateral global hegemony. But, have no fear on that score. Obama abandons nothing, and if anything, adds to “America’s leadership role.” What is retooled, or perhaps better, fine-tuned, are the means and methods of intervention without diminishing the goal. The West Point address will “articulate his view of the proper American response to a cascade of crises, from Syria’s civil war to Russia’s incursions in Ukraine,” as though the US response is just that, belated involvement, and not in ways initially causative.

Then the Great Sophistry, near as I can tell, the creation of Ben Rhodes—in Landler’s words, Obama’s “determination to chart a middle course between isolationism and military intervention,” or in Rhodes’s own, “It’s a case of interventionism but not overreach. We are leading, we are the only country that leads, but that leadership has to be in service of an international system.” The self-proclaimed “middle course,” since isolationism is rejected from day one, glosses intervention (which he readily, nay, proudly, admits), shifting the middle over to the Right, and, “as the only

country that leads,” means that “service” is to an American-defined “international system.” Back where we started from. Landler even admits that, given Bush’s having “signaled new directions [at West Point] in foreign policy,” (i.e., preemption), Obama’s “ideas are likely to have a familiar ring.” Whether Landler recognizes or not, he places the two in policy continuity, which I find, quite correct, with the caveat, that Team Obama exceeds Bush/Cheney in sophistication—hence the fraudulent “middle course”—in enlarging the scope and damage of a policy framework more ambitious in its interventionism. For gourmet Obama, the world is his oyster!

POTUS is taking on the stature of cerebral cool and Roman poignancy, a heady mix: e.g., “The president’s calibrated rationale for military intervention,” or “Mr. Obama’s anguished response to Syria has hung over the White House,” in both cases, crediting calibrations denied by the drastic upswing in drone assassinations and anguish contradicted by the determination to display his mettle backed by military force. Same old, same old—despite the propaganda campaign of assuming a middle path in world affairs. Whatever the subsuming term/s of choice, “counterrevolution,” “liberal fascism,” or simply, “global hegemony,” you can’t pour new policy into old bottles, the steady quest for domination in all things pertinent to the safety and security of advanced capitalism, goals intimately connected to massive surveillance at home and a political economy featuring wealth-concentration, deregulation, and the formation of an ever-widening underclass.

My New York Times Comment on the Landler article (Sanger’s did not afford this opportunity), same date, follows:

Landler’s article should be read along with Sanger’s news analysis, both implicitly calling for a vigorous foreign policy to satisfy domestic critics and foreign allies. In sum, war, intervention, regime change, drone assassination, cyberespionage and cyberwarfare, more joint maneuvers, more carrier groups to the Pacific, further nuclear modernization to ensure greater lethality—in a word, FASCISM. To which Obama by his every move reveals personal sympathy.

The Times as Glenn Greenwald points out in No Place to Hide is an establishment paper, careful not to antagonize the government, and indeed (just ask James Risen) solicitous about clearing everything the least bit controversial with Government before it publishes. We call this SELF-CENSORSHIP. One would have hope The Times would stand up for Freedom of the Press, but, as in these pieces, with constant reference in Sanger to “adversaries,” and Obama’s moderation and thoughtfulness, Landler, we see utter capitulation to POTUS, the anxious desire to please.

Rhodes seems to be talking, Obama, the puppet, but that is incorrect. Obama has demonstrated his thirst for lawlessness by personally authorizing assassination, by invoking the Espionage Act to silence whistleblowers, by presenting an image of peace while stoking the fires of confrontation. For what else is the Pacific-first strategy? What else, having an instrumental role in the Ukrainian coup d’etat overthrowing an elected government?

Draw back from the brink.



MAY 28, 2014

## **Monster Capitalism and the Complicit State**

The phrase “close-embrace” to describe the incestuous relationship between business and government in advanced capitalism is by Masao Maryuma, a Japanese political scientist to describe corporate concentration under the blessing and encouragement of government. This is, along with the centrality of war and market expansion, among the most salient integral features of capitalist development in its progression to monopolism, hierarchical class structure, and establishing a full-blown partnership with government: the Corporate and National-Security States merging, with national security concerned as much with protecting the market share and freedom from adverse regulation of the dominant firms in the industrial and financial sectors, as with putatively repelling a foreign foe and protecting the “homeland”. The upshot, fascism without, necessarily, the concentration camp—fascism predicated on the internalized repression of the populace, conditioned to look to the business system as the genius of the nation, its arbiter of taste, its salvation. The trickle-down paradigm follows, as does the moral superiority of those at the top AND the enterprises they lead—conversely, justified class-stratification where the lazy and/or subversive (i.e., those maladapted to the incentives offered by capitalism) fall deservedly into an underclass.

For Masao Maryuma, a description of the Japanese political-economic-ideological System, it is also the structure for what Barrington Moore, in “Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy,” characterized as “Asian Fascism”. And It is not off the mark for Franz Neumann’s analysis of German fascism in his book, *Behemoth*, where Naziism rests on the economic foundations of concentrated corporate organization, the State, incorporating within it, as also in Japan, its structure of militarism and ideology of conquest and expansion, to move therefore from corporate business organization to CORPORATISM as the core of societal organization and its ideological essence of hierarchy. Fascism, yes, no frills—the structural stage of advanced capitalism providing its own solutions for the stabilization of sector after sector (in Naziism, business “fronts”) on behalf of the dominant players, the coordination of the leading firms at the top, and the social engineering needed to achieve the social discipline (read: feelings of solidarity with those above, wrapped in the allegiance to the State, itself inseparable from the firms themselves) of the people. Workers are the soldiers-in-industry. They’re also of course the cannon fodder in implementing the dreams, imperatives, and practicalities of expansion—if the System is to grow and expand.

Labels are off-putting, especially in a society which pretends to, and whose domestic and international prestige is bound up with, democracy. Yet Japan, Germany, and the US form the triumvirate, in historical experience since the 1930s, the trends working their way forward with the advent of modern industrialization decades earlier, of fascism: concentration, hierarchy, militarism. In America, one who exposed the systemic features of the American political economy to careful scrutiny, as did Masao Maryuma, Barrington Moore, and Franz Neumann did elsewhere, was Gabriel Kolko, whose death in Amsterdam last week was a sad loss to American radical scholarship. I say “radical,” because much related scholarship into business organization and military expansion skirted around his seminal work, indeed, ignored it altogether, an establishment academic perspective in blindfold, or worse, the calculated mode for achieving rewards in the academic marketplace. Kolko did not play it safe, and although he was not in the habit of appending the term “fascism” to his evidence and interpretation, if the shoe fits, as I believe his findings do, then by all means let America own up to that and wear it.

Kolko spoke of INTERPENETRATION, a perhaps more pointedly structural term for “close-embrace,” in his analysis of government-business relations and the regulatory framework. But the result is the same, in his research borne out by the formation and role played by the Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Corporations, Federal Reserve System, and Federal Trade Commission, all in the generation which saw the critical growth of a capitalist-industrial order, and a complementing foreign policy, from the Open Door to the Battleship Navy to global intervention (sometimes separate, sometimes merged). I raise this brief discussion, partly to suggest the use of fascism, partly in remembrance of and tribute to Kolko for breaking the glass ceiling of “authoritative” scholarship still very much with us, and partly, for immediate purposes, to reintroduce General Motors and its ignition death switch into current discussion about capitalism and fascism (following two weeks ago my CounterPunch article on business criminality, exemplified by GM).

GM is not the corner grocery store (although its ads may try to give that impression: the bigger, the more homey and civic-minded), but, like JPMorgan Chase, and several others (although the cross-wiring of business and finance, as with GM, is ever-shrinking the power base), it holds together the basic fabric of society, including that which is worth fighting and dying for. It is not about to go under, however heinous its crimes—the crimes, in fact, if not a badge of respectability, serve, when they’re unpunished, as the validation of GM’s power and importance. Like the credential in capitalism, “Too big to fail,” patent criminality, followed by cover-up, signifies arrival in the nation’s pantheon as honorable by virtue of immunity, not unlike Obama’s get-out-of-jail-free card but on a more colossal level. In a fascist-prone society, everyone loves a hero, particularly a bully, and more particularly a corporation that shows that it is above the law—and a president who does the same. (Drone assassination and ignition death switch are two peas in a pod.)

[Disclosure: this is not an abstract critique of corporate capitalism; I am mad as hell at the way powerful corporations, as with GM, are grinding their victims into the dust—behavior that is systemic in capitalist development as standard procedure in the process of monopolism and structural maturity, particularly here, on the threshold of senescence. Relatedly, I wish radical writers would think foremost: evidence before ideology. I say this because one CP reader, in emails, is infuriated that I have used the New York Times, calling it names I wouldn’t want my grandchildren to hear. In Kolko’s spirit and that of any radical historian, one digs for the facts of, in this case, investigative reporting, learning through practice and other corroboration how to discount for or ignore editorial policy, which in The Times’s case is assuredly in the US-hegemonic tent, including, perhaps most of all, foreign policy. There is much to be learned from this source, and then go one step further, making the evidence a point of departure for analysis. Shall we practice censorship, because we don’t like the source of the evidence?]

There is plenty of blame to go around for this prototypic—yet, given its perpetrator’s importance, with more than the usual significance—corporate behavior. I am drawing on The Times’s article, by Rebecca Ruiz, Danielle Ivory, and Hilary Stout, entitled, “13 Deaths, Untold Heartache, From G.M. Defect,” (May 27), in which we see the classic pattern of business-government relations (although they do not need to conceptualize their account thusly, the evidence speaking for itself of inaction, collusion, and worse) to stiff-arm the public and mock the victims—an attitude sanctioned at the top, because the Bush- Obama administrations have responsibility for the conduct of their regulatory agencies. And, accordingly, should be held responsible, as well as the corporations enjoying their

protection. The article begins with the case of a young woman whose boyfriend was killed in a 2004 car accident, she at the wheel. For years she suffered intense grief: “It’s torn me up. I’ve always wondered, was it really my fault?”

Not until last week (May 21-25)—the accident being in 2004—was the fellow’s mother notified by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that his death was linked to an ignition switch defect, “the first time the family had been told anything other than negligence [by his friend] contributed to the accident.” Stone-walling, by both government and corporation alike, and, as I read it, even that news was not forthcoming until The Times had conducted an independent examination—I say “independent,” because there was cooperation neither from GM nor the NHTSA—nor did the latter compel GM to reveal/release the information. The Times did due diligence piecing out on its own the data, including that involving this last death. (Of course, the number 13 is scandalous, GM counting only front-end collisions involving a single car—one death not counted, e.g., was actually a person in the back seat where no seat belt was present. Even “experts” admit the body count will go higher, perhaps, I would add, much higher, when GM’s criteria for counting the dead are scrapped so that the focus is on the defective switch, rather than, in its campaign of vilification of the victims, charges of drugs, negligence, and alcohol.) The mother, plaintively, after receiving the email: “I was angry—at him, and at Candace for a little bit [both had experimented with recreational drugs]. Then you find out that it wasn’t them being careless. The car malfunctioned, and they didn’t have a choice.”

This puts a human face on the tragedy, while GM envelopes itself in a mask so as not to reveal its culpability and true identity. Am I singling out GM? No, this goes for much of American capitalism. A human face is verboten, lest people begin to weigh the enormity of the crime; so, therefore don’t even reveal the victims’ identities. This is GM at its most sophisticated, and really, its crudest, knowing what the System allows it to get away with. The reporters write: “Ever since G.M. began recalling 2.6 million small cars with the defective ignition switch in February, the company has refused to disclose the names of the victims or details of the accidents—even to some survivors of the crashes and relatives of the dead. G.M. also has not shared its interpretation of the data from the so-called black boxes that helped the automaker identify the 13 deaths, leaving some local and state investigators to draw their own conclusions—often erroneously—about the crashes.” And GM moves from impersonal, to straightout Kafkaesque: “Inside G.M., the nation’s largest automaker, some of the 13 victims appear on charts and graphs with a date and a single word: ‘fatal’.” By preconception, really, “police files and state highway patrol records” do no better; “they [victims] are the subjects of accident investigations, tragic but mostly unremarkable, some involving alcohol, inexperienced drivers or failure to wear seatbelts.” Anything but the defective ignition switch!

In fact, they didn’t stand a chance: “All but one of the accidents were single-car crashes [the exception, a drunk-driver hitting one of the cars], in which the driver lost control [because of a loss of power, etc.] and slammed head-on into an obstacle, usually a tree. In every case, the air bags did not deploy.” Like the victims of drone assassination, they were treated as anonymous ciphers. Here, the corporate spirit of GM, again not alone in this world, shines through. As Ruiz and the others write: “When presented with the victims’ names compiled by The Times, G.M. would neither confirm nor deny them. ‘We are not publicly identifying victims out of respect for families’ privacy,” Greg Martin, a company spokesman, said in an email. He added, ‘Out of respect for their

privacy, we do not discuss private conversations that we may have had with families.” With solicitude like that, who needs Caligula, Jack the Ripper, or for that matter Obama, the current patron saint of deregulation and shield for corporate practices.

GM, confident a law unto itself, retreats still further into itself. The reporters state, “Some relatives say that the automaker has refused to even communicate privately about the accidents [recall the objection to public disclosure] and they suspect the company’s secrecy has more to do with containing its legal liability.” Another human face, the mother of a daughter killed in a 2006 crash and among the 13: “It would have been nice if they had acknowledged it, at least to us. G.M. has just been hiding behind lawyers through this whole thing.” The words, “at least to us,” are heartbreaking. If GM had not withheld information, police officers “might have changed their investigations.” The state trooper investigating the crash described above, and jumped to the conclusion the young woman was at fault, told Ruiz, reporting from Texas, that “had he known about the ignition flaw, ‘in essence that would change everything.’”

There is more, The Times compelled to do its own leg-work, a compilation that gives the lie to GM accusations of victim-deficiencies, but this single sentence identifies the problem: “The company has acknowledged that as early as 2001 it had evidence that the ignition switch could, if jostled, suddenly shut off the power in a moving car, disabling air bags and impeding braking and steering systems.” Hence, single-car crashes, the obscene defamation of victims, the corporate hubris with high-powered attorneys in attendance. Oh yes, settlements; even then, “lawyers say the ignition switch defect was not identified in the litigation as a contributing factor.” This was only disclosed in a deposition for a separate case taken last year. As for the settlements, quintessential corporate behavior having the law standing behind it: “The families would not discuss the precise terms of their settlements—most are subject to confidential terms—but some said the payments were not large and the process was sometimes unpleasant.” I give the last word to the mother quoted earlier: “Those attorneys dragged my son through the mud, and he wasn’t even there to defend himself.”

I think we have seen a microcosm of impending fascism in what GM does and what it represents, in which one must look to structure (not the formal values of a society, generally honored in the breach), where, as here, hierarchy and democracy are completely incompatible, the former encasement for corporate irresponsibility, assisted by the protective—and friendly—arm of government. I wish it were possible to stand up for Mrs. Erickson’s son, and bring GM to its knees, in which case I would say, Come on, America, take off the gloves, put on brass knuckles, and SHAME GM. And now—radicals will have to turn away, for I would also say, SHAME the UAW for playing the game. Wages, shop-floor issues, union recognition, benefits, emphatically yes, but what about the larger society? Presently, as workers, there is little or no recognition of the social welfare. The reason, because this would mean questioning, going against, capitalism itself. Labor will stand up for capital because it means jobs. UAW/GM, until that changes, or at the very least results in the greater structural democratization of American industry, along with a sustained and defiant critique of US foreign policy, there will be more ignition killer switches at home, drone assassinations abroad. And when I say I do not intend to single-out GM alone, I also do not intend to single out the UAW alone—both are representatives of whole communities of interest which will have to change if the political economy is to be dedicated to the needs of the people.

MY New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

GM: Too big to fail? I hope not. Deception, cover-up, high-powered lawyers, all at every turn. Lying that suppressing names of victims is done out of courtesy to their families, is unconscionable and disgusting. Parameters applicable to dead-and-injured count, slimy and irresponsible. Sitting on information of possible defect having lethal consequences, worse than shameful. In plumbing the depths of GM MORAL DEPRAVITY, the cover up is almost as bad as the ignition death switch.

“Her 1-year old great-grandson survived but was paralyzed from the accident,” should, as step one, be printed on every GM ad, piece of stationery, executive salary and bonus check. A criminal corporation at the top of the US industrial pyramid does not speak well for the health and integrity of American capitalism. And will all those investigations—federal, state, internal—result in punishment, especially commensurate with the crime. Very, very doubtful. For what allowed GM to think it could get away with its behavior (in fact, it probably has) is a regulatory system designed to PROTECT rather than regulate firms and activities in its charge. Fraudulent from day one (see the late Gabriel Kolko’s “Triumph of Conservatism” and “Railroads and Regulation” for the genesis of the interpenetration of business and government, the latter shielding the former, as in ICC, TR’s Bureau of Corporations, and, of course, Wilson’s Federal Reserve System and FTC).

GM unscathed, regulation a farce!

MAY 30, 2014

### **Obama’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Aggression**

Obama’s West Point speech (May 28) now behind us, it is possible to take stock of what the White House hails as an epoch-making pronouncement of change in American foreign policy, but actually is a mere propaganda blip on the historical screen designed to answer a raucous, belligerent, intemperate Right calling for unilateral global dominance through primarily military means, and an alleged Left that, if anything has been passive, noncritical, without substantive alternatives, ideologically trapped by the lesser-of-two-evils argument offering nowhere else to go—and therefore, despite projecting a mythic radicalism in order to assert his centrism, he does not even bother to address. The speech becomes a verbal exercise to give the appearance of change while pursuing the selfsame Rightist policies he feigns to have transcended, but reducing the raucousness by several decibels.

Obama personifies Reaction in postmodern dress. His speech is a self-advertisement for greatness perhaps hoping to cash-in on George C. Marshall’s Harvard commencement address of 1947 announcing the Marshall Plan, so high have aides and the press touted its significance, as in Peter Baker’s New York Times article (May 29) entitled, “Rebutting Critics, Obama Seeks Higher Bar for Military Action.” In fact, nothing has changed, just the rhetoric (for which we most probably must thank Ben Rhodes, who in a similar vein depicted Obama the man of peace in the earlier Cairo speech dedicated to a rapprochement with the Arab and Muslim peoples. Nothing came of that, nothing will come of this, because both are prevarications, the West Point case not even rising to a promise of change so much as a repackaging of current policy through offering qualifications not easily detected when one starts by offering Obama a free pass and sees what one wants to see.

The sleight-of-hand becomes obvious when one states the fuller posture of US foreign policy, a context which makes peace impossible to achieve. Raise the bar higher, where the conflict is inconsequential, drop the bar altogether when it comes to China and Russia, a condition, because representing a renewal of the Cold War (which itself, in reality, never ended), that vitiates by the enormity of the risk-taking the totality of the policy framework. Casual use of the term “leadership,” as though divinely bestowed, is so frequently invoked in Obama’s speech that its correlates no longer have to be identified: the right to guide the world structure (primarily, capitalism alone an acceptable system); counterrevolution, the practical means of its achievement; intervention, regime change, espionage, subversion, paramilitary operations, the nuts-and-bolts of maintaining political-economic-ideological supremacy.

How expect peace when everything in the US policy arsenal works against it, particularly the complete lack of transparency in government, and interrelated, the drive to achieve the massive surveillance of the American public, now indeed consummated, a hog-tied public ripe for the pounding home of the state of false consciousness and consequent societal blindness to foreign aggression and adventurism? Obama may claim that, as here, he wants to avoid a military commitment to rebel forces in Syria (not, however, fastidious about arming them and pressing for regime change), but that counts for little, and certainly not a new doctrine, the so-called middle course between isolationism and full-scale war, when, toward China, his Pacific-first strategy entails the relocation of large-scale naval forces, including carrier groups, long-range aircraft adapted to nuclear war, and other “assets” shifted to the region, combined with firming up military alliances, executing joint maneuvers, and, seemingly unrelated, but of course not, the creation of the TransPacific Partnership, here the militarization of trading, tariff, and investment (so because supplementing the main thrust of the policy framework), a confrontation, big time, for the purpose of encircling, containing, and ultimately isolating China.

No evidence whatsoever about a policy-transformation, nor, for Russia, the same, Ukraine being the plaything of US policy, as in having actively shared in engineering the coup that overthrew the legally constituted government, knowingly working with fascist-oriented groups to that end, and, like China, consciously seeking confrontation, for now, through the successful placement of NATO troops on the Russian border. The speech has nothing to say about these developments, studiously ignores them, so that “leadership” becomes a benign abstraction. Too, there is no reference to domestic surveillance and foreign eavesdropping, nor to cyberwarfare—again, factors of sufficient significance as to deny claims a transformation is occurring. Even the most blatant of Obama’s bag of tricks, his personally authorized campaign of drone assassination, should make one suspicious of his peace pronouncements, a high-tech fascination if not amusement in which the victim has been vaporized halfway around the world.

He criticizes “overreach,” yet is this anything but? The political-ideological spectrum, the product of bipartisan agreement and practice, has shifted so far to the Right, that the record he has compiled can be deemed centrist—though, in truth, bordering on, if not fully there yet, fascism. One searches the speech in vain for evidence of drawing back, even the desire to draw back, from staggering military budgets, that and the foregoing obscured by the mere blathering of peace, and the implied threat that absent American “leadership” the world would be subject to barbarism, destruction, chaos. If anything, terrorism is larger in scope and range than ever, decentralized, warranting ever greater vigilance (read: permanent war preparation, abrogation of civil liberties),

the bar here dropping several notches. The performance of Obama, a consummate showmanship, is positively beguiling, the discrepancy between word and deed, more so because he gets away with it.

One reason: an intact continuity of Cold War sentiment dating back decades, succumbed to on all sides, including the labor movement, so that under changing historical circumstances the persistence of the deep-lying anticommunism, despite what are now multiple adversaries (themselves adopting capitalistic features) and therefore shifting ideological ground from the original, is still internalized in the American mindset with the result that it becomes serviceable for the next stage utilized to continue US hegemony. Anticommunism has become transmuted into counterterrorism, yet it contains all of the ideological and emotional baggage carried over from the former. America requires an enemy, to keep its own house in order. The old one starting to wear thin, we now have a new one—and the expansion of institutional mechanisms to surmount it, e.g., the blanket surveillance of the American people to prevent dissent.

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In his address before the 1,064 graduating cadets in dress whites, Obama's declaration of change leads to its negation, the escalation of war-provoking policies and their military implementation currently in force. The graduating cadets will, as duly commissioned officers, take their place on the ramparts of Fortress America, protecting the homeland, except that the best defense is reckoned to be an aggressive offense. They will soon find themselves in far-flung places, assisted by CIA-JSOC paramilitary forces and "private contractors" of the Blackwater-type, mercenaries (a means of lowering the count of assigned combat troops) under changing logos. Mission crawl and mission denial become one.

Obama's speech is something new in the books, neither Woodrow Wilson's pious, inflated rhetoric in which the blade of the sword flashes the light of heaven, nor FDR's plainspoken reassurance of victory, but here a purposeful deflation of geostrategic planning and ambition in order to hide what comes close to being a passion for world conquest. At best (or worst) we see an assembled cast—really, a unified government, the three branches, the two parties, differences, notwithstanding rhetoric, encompassing a very small ideological spectrum, its boundaries defined by advanced-capitalism, militarism, expansion— that I would characterize, albeit harshly, missionaries of nihilism, the more so the closer to Obama. With Team Obama still including Brennan, Rice, Power, Rhodes, Clapper, several tiers of NSA, CIA, FBI, JSOC, Chiefs of Staff, and Pentagon (I beg forgiveness if I've omitted some, whether individuals or agencies—one of my favorites, SSO, in the bowels of NSA), how even dream, much less expect, the West Point speech to signify a change of course?

Missionaries of nihilism, true believers in the magical powers of government remoteness and deception, in which, if our troops (he begins the speech by shedding tears over four cadets from Class of '09, when first he spoke at West Point, who are no longer with us, yet nary a sigh when sending thousands more service personnel to their deaths, and far more civilians, in wholly illegal actions tantamount to—if he were not POTUS—war crimes) are cannon fodder, our people have become intellectual, or better yet, ideological, fodder, meant to be deceived, because deception is placed in the service of hegemony, of which there is no more fitting aspiration for a nation to maintain. For that is what the speech is about: deception in the service of hegemony, hegemony by this point in American foreign policy becoming the surrogate for or vehicle to achieve the

reification of capitalism, really a twofold process of reification, first of hegemony, as a thing in itself, no questions asked, loyalty demanded, and then capitalism, a thing in itself, again same conditions.

We speak of national honor, and here, the manifold duties and obligations of leadership, leadership itself never questioned, when militarism, the specter energizing the whole framework of thought (or ideology) provides its implementation, when what we mean—our mentalset bogged down in or clogged up by coded signifiers—is the active preservation of a world system under America's aegis that includes but carries beyond traditional purposes of imperialism, beginning with market penetration and security for global investment, but takes on an increasingly razor-sharp political-economic-ideological program of counterrevolution to ensure the success of the whole. Alternative patterns of systemic development must be and thereby are ruled out, as challenges which might upset America's complacency about its Exceptionalism and impede its progress in world trade. Whether as values, lifestyle, or the temerity of nations to go their own way, the rule is, one way, our way, or else the highway, the latter a ticket to destruction or structural oblivion. For the former but essentially both, read: shock-and-awe, regime change, intervention, isolation, containment, economic retaliation, for as the war-mind gets busy, all manner of responses are possible.

Nominally, for Obama, as in Baker's aforementioned article, the higher bar to military action provides greater latitude for selective conflict. It does not change the fact of and presumed necessity for military action itself—military action that is winnable, quick, decisive, and based entirely on America's freedom of choice, determined case-by-case, as interpreted through an ever-expanding standard, enunciated in the speech, but neglected as to import by the media, of the national interest. China and Russia, all bets are off, the bar is moveable, dropping steadily downward; meanwhile, American militarism grinds on, Syria (to which he gives attention) fast becoming the stand-in for Ukraine, and we as a nation now divided between those who believe Obama on peace and social justice and those who want him to go further, with few Left voices to call his bluff and expose his treachery. For that would be considered unpatriotic and irresponsible, the ideological pressures seemingly too strong to withstand. Besides, the reasoning goes, look how bad the Republicans are; be thankful for what we have. False consciousness obliterates class—or any other—understanding, one more reason not be blown away by the West Point speech.

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Instead, pronounce curses on what we have, what I might summarize as: The blanket of surveillance/the surveillance blanket. On the first, surveillance of the American people (and for Keith Alexander of NSA, why not the world?) has reached a point whereby privacy has been effectively extinguished. That is fascism, slice it, dice it, any way you wish. Democracy, absent privacy, is a hollow shell, its foreign policy, accordingly, and in practice, whatever ruling groups want and how they interpret the systemic imperatives of the framework to which they owe their status and privileges. A democratic society does not SPY on its own people—or any others. Read Glenn Greenwald's "No Place To Hide" and be amazed at the extent of the surveillance, the number of programs trotted out by NSA, like PRISM, BLARNEY, FAIRVIEW, OAKSTAR, STORMBREW, a library of acronyms from hell that continues on, stretching the alphabet to its limits, and PROJECT BULLRUN, EGOTISTICAL GIRAFFE, MUSCULAR, OLYMPIA...need I continue?



The young patriarch of nihilism wisely looks on, surrounded by gems of humanity like Michael Hayden, whom I neglected to mention (even Brennan, waterboarding stalwart, seems eclipsed by the war hawks of Team Obama), now, at West Point, himself the window dressing for an alleged new, transformative vision of American foreign policy. It plays well there, because few in the nation believe him in the first place. Americans reject peace. Our political sanity depends on the Constant Enemy at the gates—the permanent threat, so that we can selectively scapegoat in such an atmosphere anyone whom we wish, this as prelude to and ratifying condition for, above all, keeping ourselves in line, lest we grow restive over consumerism and military conquest. The West Point speech is an integral part of the bread-and-circuses, its equivalent, the music of sweet patriotism, we thrive on to ward off occasional self-doubts about the splendors of American civilization and the costs of maintaining it and keeping it on top.

All of the foregoing feeds into what I would term the liberalization of militarism. Nothing is changed, only rendered the more delicious: e.g., humanitarian interventionism (implied in the speech, a racket to justify every US military action and/or power play since the days of the Open Door—late 19th century); y Exceptionalism, (also implied there, with its compelling message collective moral superiority); and the Obama pep-talk riff on the affirmative spirit, the guaranteed feel-good vibes found in a key phrase of the speech, “America Must Always Lead,” hardly the formula for a change in the direction taken by foreign policy. As the rhetoric rises, the curtain draws down on human freedom at home and abroad, the latter especially relevant here as there is no sign of favoring the mutual renunciation of force and a willingness on America’s part, quite the opposite, to accept an end to its unilateralism.

To return then to the blanket of surveillance/surveillance blanket formulation, one sees that the former renders impossible, by definition, the existence of a free people. And for ruling groups, under whatever formal or informal arrangement (for they do, indeed, exist!), that is as it should be, in practice as well as logic, if they are to continue, as now, to act with impunity in America. With the blanket of surveillance, then, also comes the surveillance blanket, the comfy feeling of our political-economic-military elites that not only can they hide underneath the bedding once the pacification of the people has been achieved, and thereby conduct their deadly business (for what else is the “defense” sector but that, along with copycat corporate practices such as GM’s ignition death switch?), but also they can suck their thumbs in complacent disregard of the misery and human suffering they’ve caused. Like Schroeder in “Peanuts,” the surveillance blanket here imparts an assured sense of security and comfort as profits roll in and the populace genuflects in appreciation for the goodies descending from above. Valor being one, for at several steps removed one of our own presses a button and a supposed terrorist without benefit of the rule of law is reduced to a blood spat thousands of miles away. We the nation solemnly drawing closer together did it, West Pointers all, and no Commie-Muslim-Gay is going to destroy the homeland or rob us of our heritage.

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Hence, Obama pontificates at West Point, cocooned in the splendor of Military Force surrounding him, a man of steel, now that he has made a quick visit to the troops in Afghanistan, preceded by a whirlwind trip around the Pacific Rim attempting to fix and nail down the coffin for China, and that, preceded still earlier by providing instrumental help enabling the fascists to assist in Ukraine to pull off the coup d’etat that overthrew a democratically-elected president in Ukraine.

How therefore, in the short space of four months (I'm counting the coup-preparations from mid-March), can one expect, following such a build-up of US unilateral global engagement, the putative sea change in American foreign policy? Obviously, one cannot. Obama feeds on militarism, the way Gandhi, his opposite, abstained from food as a means for achieving independence. In both cases, this represents a way of life, and for Obama, the way is clear for advancing what I have termed the militarization and financialization of capitalism. Liberalism greases the rails, so that his newly minted middle course between isolationism and intervention is a somewhat depraved middle veering rightward in inspiration and from its inception.

Even the New York Times, hardly a critic of the administration, comes to our rescue (and per usual finds nothing wrong about the very policies, doctrines, practices compatible with, and essential to, global hegemony), for in reporting "Highlights of the West Point Speech," (May 29), no reporter-attribution, it states, among his "key points," as follows: (1) "Mr. Obama rejected the notion that American influence is in decline and said that by most measures, the United States has never been stronger relative to the rest of the world"; (2) "He said that the U.S. military remained peerless, and that threats from other nations were minimal. Today's dangers, he said, paled compared with that of the Cold War"; and (3) "He emphasized that the United States would not hesitate to use military force when 'core interests demand it,' defining that as 'when our people are threatened; when our livelihood is at stake; or when the security of our allies is in danger.' Outside of those cases, he said, collective action with allies is most likely to lead to successful outcomes".

Nothing has changed. Even discounting for slickness, the paradigm for global hegemony is unshaken and, if anything, finds crisper rationale for pressing the outward, counterrevolutionary thrust. "Never stronger": the cheerleader exhorting the troops (no pun intended) to flex muscle and RESIST impending decline. Why even give reference to decline, unless, deep-down, there is a recognition both that the system of advanced capitalism is experiencing grave problems (I won't say "breaking down," because that would be outside his intellectual ken) and that an ever strong military—nothing in the speech about reducing the (astronomical) military budget—is imperative to keep America in place. "U.S. military remained peerless": this, hardly the rallying cry for PEACE, combines with the minimization of threat, wholly contradicted by current military activity which is not slated to diminish, first and foremost, China, with the Pacific-first strategy (for which he claims emphasis if not authorship) implemented through the "pivot" including large naval forces and long-range nuclear-prepared aircraft, and the TPP for stimulating Asian trade and thereby bringing these countries into closer military, as well as economic, alliance, at the expense of China, and second, Russia, where the geostrategic goal of placing NATO on its border is behind much of the US interest in Ukraine. Rather than threats paling in comparison with the Cold War, Obama by his actions ON BOTH FRONTS is happily announcing that the Cold War is here to stay, perhaps bigger and better than ever. Finally, "When core interests demand it": Open sesame to military power on a grand scale commensurate with the elasticity of the formula, which in fact leaves nothing out, from universalizing (already the case) the so-called war on terror ("when our people are threatened"), to any obstruction of American commercial-financial penetration on a global basis ("our livelihood is at stake"), particularly directed against China, but including favorable tariff and investment policies wherever US capitalism decides to locate, to, as well the solid phalanx of intervention, the underlying mechanism of joint-maneuvers, the whole ball of wax of forming and preserving alliances, starting with NATO, but also bilateral guarantees, as in siding with Japan over disputed rocks in the ocean ("the security of our allies is in danger").

In all of these cases, the US “would not hesitate to use military force.” Under the rubric, “core interests demand it,” then, Obama prescribes unilateral military action. The core interests are non-negotiable. Only that which lies outside elicits the collective response with allies. Here the bar is raised; in truth, the bar is down addressed to his primary concern. That is why the West Point speech, uniting militarism and expansion, raises Obama’s war-proclivities a significant notch. As noted, he also expressed concern over Syria, America’s next Ukraine, if not its next Iraq or Afghanistan. And for good measure, “he announced a proposed \$5 billion Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund that would help countries such as Yemen and Mali fight emerging terrorist threats.” With a speech like that, one should urge the Nobel Committee to award Obama a second Peace Prize, so deserving is he as proven by his actions...at least as perceived by his inflated self-righteousness and superabundant ego. And the American public remains divided, one-half accepting him, from reluctance to high praise, the other half exhorting him to greater military glory or, failing that, displacing him for a New Warrior to smite the enemy.

Because the West Point speech was preceded by Obama’s announcement the day before—a superb public relations gesture—of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, I include as background my New York Times Comment on the editorial, “Trapped in Afghanistan,” (May 27), mine, same date, followed by a second NYT Comment on the Baker article (May 29), mine, same date:

## I

It is good to see that, for once, The Times is not a rubber stamp for administration policy. Yet that is a long way from saying the war was questionable from the outset. How about some fundamental investigative reporting, rather than lukewarm, pious editorials, to determine US policy objectives. Surely, opposition to the Taliban was never sufficient reason, especially since we built them up to fight the Russians in the first place.

The Obama withdrawal (?) of forces is suspicious, given his Pacific-first strategy to contain and isolate China and his Trans-Pacific Partnership to complement military planning and provide for economic encirclement. On the issue of peace—the response to Russia on Ukraine as an example, where the US facilitated the coup d’etat to overthrow the legitimate government—Obama’s word is suspect, so that even on Afghanistan, as per his global record, America can be expected to remain there for some time. The area is pivotal for exercising control via exerting pressure simultaneously on China and Russia—crucial for US aspiration to continue maintaining global hegemony.

Unfortunately, Obama and his geostrategic framework are on the wrong side of history. Unilateralism is no longer possible. China and Russia both refuse to be further intimidated, carrier battle groups directed to one, NATO forces on the Russian border, the other.

The world is waking up to bullying, drone assassination, paramilitary operations, regime change, and rejects them.

## II

Try as one might, and I include NYT here, to portray Obama as moderate, i.e., as seeking a middle way, neither the West Point speech nor his actual record warrants the view.

Microscopic intervention over seeming nonessentials—fine; but his Pacific-first strategy, combined with TPP, puts deliberately the US on a course of confrontation with China, as does US support for the Ukrainian coup, with Russia.

Who is he kidding? The defense budget is astronomical. Nuclear modernization for greater lethality continues apace. Massive surveillance of the American people gives the lie to any attempt to characterize Obama and the administration as other than fascistic-prone. How else interpret this onslaught on civil liberties?

West Point may in the eyes of his staff usher in a new era, one Obama hopes will bind subsequent administrations, but that era will be even worse, more dangerous, than the present, because the US by his own statements does not intend to surrender unilateral world leadership—economic, political, military, ideological. As the world system becomes more decentralized through the further rise of power of China and Russia, the industrialization of Third World countries, the economic independence of Brazil, Japan, and the EU, America can no longer expect to enjoy its unique post-World War 2 position at the top.

Obama's blueprint is to marshal force for the big encounters, always keeping the US in a state of readiness and its people under tight social control.

JUNE 3, 2014

### **Techno-Fascism (NSA) and the Obama Administration**

History is a holistic political-structural process, Marx's dialectical framework notwithstanding, because even allowing for contradiction there are successive stages of integration, from each of which conflicting tendencies are generated. There is nothing deterministic here, merely the assertion that reality has a unified character, whether or not experiencing social struggle. And in America, regrettably not, upper groups maintaining internal economic-ideological supremacy, beginning, I suspect, from the late-19th century, and progressively tightening its control over society through time up to and including the present. This is not an empty formula that radicals have learned through rote—the experience of gradually shrinking boundaries within which to achieve social change becomes apparent on an almost daily basis, the rapidity of the process now sufficient cause for alarm—yet met with false consciousness below, constant movements toward confrontation and war both to instill among the populace loyalty, consensus, silence, and among upper groups, the impetus for militarism and capitalist expansion (themselves structurally integrated), false consciousness above of another sort: a pathological quest for global dominance of the international system when that system itself no longer fears America.

America in decline, or even in not absolute terms, but rather, within a world system that in power terms is becoming de-centered (a multipolar framework), is losing its way, becoming desperate, striking out at real and imagined enemies (some from the past, as in an anticommunism never put to rest), tempted to manufacture crises as a way of preserving domestic cohesion, paramount for clinging to the unilateral military dominance to which it had been accustomed since World War 2, or at least its symbols if not its substance. Decline is never hospitable ground for democracy, particularly a democracy that requires, as a condition of its functioning, a permanent state of war—where we have been since perhaps the Korean War; and hence, a questionable democracy at best,

and since the Bush-Obama years no longer subject to debate. I say, the shrinking boundaries on a daily basis for achieving social change: Therefore, let's go back several days to three separate signs bearing out the foregoing discussion, all, I believe, interrelated, because rooted in the needs of an American capitalism struggling to protect its hegemonic status on top the global pyramid.

## I

In my CounterPunch article, "FBI Authorized Cyberattacks: Further Signs of Unfolding Fascism," (May 6), we met Hector Monsegur, a true American PATRIOT, as advertised by, and from the standpoint of, the US government, one whom, because the FBI, through harsh threats of criminal prosecution against the hacker group, Anonymous, had been turned (gleefully, it would seem) him into an informer helping to direct the Bureau's cyberwarfare campaign against foreign governments and corporations. In the USG's telling, i.e., the federal prosecutor's drawn indictment to the Court (praising him to the hilt for his cooperation in implicating the other members of the group—Jeffrey Hammond, for one, serving a 10-year sentence), he moves from Patriot to National Hero for the big snitch and tech-savvy assistance in what amounts to highly illegal attacks, not least because obviously stretching the FBI's actions beyond US boundaries as well as the nature of the espionage (although possibly cleansed through the Patriot Act responsible for still more gross violations of civil liberties and international law).

With this background, we move to last week in illustration of Obama's full-court press toward incipient if not also actualized fascism. I say "Obama," because in this case the FBI but more important a discussion to follow on NSA, one finds a direct projection of/from the government; neither one, again, especially NSA, can be dismissed simply as a "rogue" agency, and instead reflect the pith of Administration policy: pursuit of continued global hegemony through solidification, beyond obviously powerful military forces, of a National Security State, a prime requirement being the practice of surveillance at home and abroad. One of the tests of a democratic polity is accountability at the very top—and regrettably America has neither, the lack of the latter testifying to the absence of the former.

Conversely, the situation now worsens, each daily flagrancy, as in the violation and near-destruction of privacy, equally, rule of law, in government's working toward that end, reveals the deadly metastasizing of American institutions in general, the courts, Congress, ultimately the people: ramifying consequences of cynicism, corruption, and, to be more charitable than the situation warrants, false consciousness, all in the service of ruling groups integrated in the form of financial-industrial-commercial-military elites, with what is now termed the political class (a designation I find, as to its role and independent power, a nifty slogan yet wholly inadequate ) merely their man/maid servants, for an older generation of radicals, then, following Veblen, the Swiss Guards of the Vested Interests, servicing their needs in domestic and foreign policy.

Take the last week in May (let's skip over the "political class" in favor of the institutionalized structure of power, starting with POTUS in collaboration with the FBI and CIA), here our friend Monsegur (known by the alias "Sabu"), the Guardian (June 1) in its subhead saying it all: "Authorities credit Hector Xavier Monsegur with helping them cripple Anonymous in lenient sentence of time served." He gets off—the corruption of the courts noted above. Monsegur, the Guardian reports, "who by the US government's calculations participated in computer hacker attacks on more than 250 public and private entities at a cost of up to \$50m in damages, was

released from a Manhattan courtroom on Tuesday after the judge saluted his ‘extraordinary cooperation’ with the FBI.”

Who is more guilty in this farce, Monsegur, or Loretta Preska, chief judge of the federal district court of the southern district of New York, is a moot question, and, standing behind her, the FBI’s crass practices of intimidation from which the federal court system looks away or actively praises. Monsegur had faced “a maximum sentence according to official guidelines of more than 26 years.” Nope. In pronouncing sentence the judge “repeatedly praised what she called his ‘truly extraordinary cooperation,’ providing USG “sophisticated and complex assistance” enabling it “to pierce the secrecy surrounding LutzSec [a UK and US hacker group that had broken away from Anonymous] and successfully prosecute its members.” Informant on others, FBI cyberwarrior par excellence—not a hero, however, to members of Anonymous, which, as one told the Guardian: “Monsegur is, first and foremost a criminal; the FBI’s cyber crime task force are his co-conspirators. While operating under their supervision, Monsegur committed numerous felonies which should in no way be excused due to his protected informant status.”

Well-put, and to me, chalk up another score for fascism, the leading domestic federal law-enforcement agency in the commission of crimes, turning those it prosecutes for criminal punishment into informants in exchange for leniency—while in addition pursuing more sinister ends, to wit, seeking (as does mass surveillance itself) to cow the populace into submission. Here the Anonymous spokesperson is right on target: “The FBI continues to use captured informants, who commit egregious crimes in pursuit of reduced sentences, for the sole purpose of creating ‘examples’ to frighten the public. They do this with the hope of pacifying online dissent and snuffing out journalistic investigations into the US government’s misconduct.” This is what I meant by the metastasizing effects of government policy on behalf of global hegemony and domestic social control, both defining a unified whole. (Hammond, convicted, operated under Monsegur’s direction, “launch[ing] cyber-attacks around the world,” and then sentenced because failing to be turned. In addressing the court, he told Preska: “The government celebrates my conviction and imprisonment, hoping that it will close the door on the full story. I took responsibility for my actions, by pleading guilty, but WHEN WILL THE GOVERNMENT BE MADE TO ANSWER FOR ITS CRIMES?” (my caps.)

Monsegur went on to secure convictions of others. In the court memorandum disclosing how Hammond was caught, an obvious case of entrapment, it becomes clear that Monsegur “had been put at the hub of a vast web of surveillance,” for it was revealed that while he remained in New York, he “engaged in online chats with Hammond (who was then in Chicago), while coordinating with FBI agents in New York, physical surveillance teams deployed in Chicago, and an electric surveillance unit in Washington DC.” When in June 2011 the FBI came knocking on his door, “[h]is transformation from a hacker legend into an informant was instantaneous—he agreed to cooperate with the government immediately,” to which, at sentencing, Preska was in fulsome praise, the quickness allowing the FBI to move against LutzSec before its members could be warned. As a UC Hastings law professor (obviously not John Yoo of White House Counsel torture-authorization fame), summarizing Monsegur’s work for the FBI in launching attacks against foreign governments, stated: a sting operation for a crime already in motion was one thing, but it was quite another, “when you contribute to the creation, inducement and execution of a crime that never was.

Particularly when those crimes may very well affect our foreign policy.” Welcome Team FBI USA, Obama coach-cheerleader, etc.

## II

Turning next to the NSA, one sees techno-fascism in full parade-dress, massive surveillance, here, facial recognition data, now combined with practically every other conceivable means of collecting and storing information on Americans—and as much as possible, globally. (Hayden, Alexander, Clapper, the whole leadership crew, past, present, future, listen up: how about the measurement, via forced registration, of men’s private parts—in millimeters, of course, to ensure accuracy in order to intimidate against dissent, facilitate government prosecution, induce apathy toward and complicity with public policy, therefore carrying further the purposes of massive surveillance? Seemingly, no stone can be left unturned in discovering and uprooting subversion.) Here, James Risen and Laura Poitras—both of whom deserve and have earned the respect of those committed to civil liberties—in their New York Times article, “N.S.A. Collecting Millions of Faces from Web Images,” (May 31), present a breaking story in what one might call a chapter in runaway fascism, particularly odious on top of everything else, including, if I may digress to establish the spirit of government making facial recognition a viable tool of the megalomaniac NSA in its quest to obliterate privacy in world-dimensional terms.

I press for small details to illumine the institutional core of repression, here a societal pattern, if we keep to the short-term, which has been well-established since the enshrinement of Sect. 25 of the Patriot Act (with that Act legitimating so much of government policy, one wonders why any demurral about naming fascism for what it is—the signs, from militarism, to surveillance, to financial-corporate concentration, to xenophobic and ethnocentric mental patterns, all around us and germane to the public acceptance of hegemonic goals). Charlie Savage’s NYT article, “U.S. Seeks to Censor More of Memo That Approved Drone Strike on American,” (May 28), refers both to Obama’s personally authorized assassination of a US citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki—drone assassination, as I see it, itself a form of, even prime example of, techno-fascism, the pressing of a button halfway around the world to leave a blood spat where a human being once stood—and the white-collar version of techno-fascism of the more routine kind, REDACTION, as a means of protecting government from the charge of, and evidence demonstrating, war crimes. He does not call either, a war crime; emphasis is on cover-up as a general proposition of hiding illegality.

Obama-Holden, the Castor-Pollux of Censorship, have, short of rewriting the Constitution, done all in their power to forestall condemnation for the killing of an American citizen without an indictment, the right to counsel, a jury trial of his/her peers, due process in all its manifold accordance of rights, and instead—no boots on the ground—murder via impersonal technological magic, an Obama favorite, given his usage far exceeding that of his predecessor (metastasizing, in this case, down to the nitty-gritty of conducting warfare, already plagued with atrocities enough). Savage writes: “One week after the Obama administration said it would comply with a federal appeals court ruling ordering it to make public portions of a Justice Department memo that signed off on the targeted killing of a United States citizen, the administration is now asking the court for permission to censor additional passages of the document.” Disgraceful, no, nauseating—why? Not only the stall-tactic, but that the death-authorization was a SECRET MEMO, only seeing the light of day through being forced through an FIA lawsuit. Suppose the memo were allowed to stand, and then gather motion as binding precedent: the killing of citizens, whether on grounds of national

security or, say, anticommunism, or counterterrorism, would be standard operating procedure. Hide the memo, it stinks to high heaven!

The designated driver/culprit, the memo's principal author, fresh from Harvard Law (an ideal soul mate of Obama, who as president of the Law Review had not written an article for it—HLS, what a staggering decline since the days of Holmes and Roscoe Pound), is David Barron, confirmed the week before "to an appeals court judgeship," what he had been to DOJ Monsegur had been to FBI, complicit through direct involvement in murder. The memo, July 16, 2010, al-Awlaki struck down in Yemen September 2011, it was only the ACLU-NYT suit seeking the memo's public disclosure that got us this far. Savage: "The Justice Department said it would soon disclose a version of the memo with the additional passages it wants to keep redacted blocked out. It said the additional passages discussed classified fact not legal reasoning." Classification, the mother of all redactions, has been the handy device behind which the Obama government hides, and the basis for its forays into somewhat clumsy storm-trooper-like attacks on whistleblowers via the Espionage Act. This is truly an embarrassment, if not outright sign of fascism.

In January 2013 a Federal District Court judge "ruled that the government could withhold the memo from the public entirely," which was overturned this past April by a panel of the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit (NY), ruling "that the government must make public portions of the memo that lay out legal analysis, though not facts based on classified intelligence." Even this did not satisfy USG which in a new filing claimed that what "the court had designated for public release contained further information that should be exempt from disclosure." An assistant US attorney—DOJ at all times up to its neck in fighting disclosure—chastised the higher court, essentially for its stupidity (its decision based on "inadvertence or mistake") and moved "to keep its entire motion seeking additional redactions SECRET" (my caps.), a nerviness I should think beyond the pale, to which the court denied "that request" and said "that as much of the motion as possible would have to be made public." The court then went one step further, revealing "new details about several previous rounds of then-secret negotiations between the court and the government, dating back to February [2014], over what would be redacted."

The National Security State can be seen here to vitiate the rule of law, secrecy being in the DNA of the Executive permeating through all its agencies and bureaus, not least, DOJ. Will we ever get the truth? A week ago Solicitor General Verrilli Jr. said with release of the memo another appeal for redaction would follow, including the identity of the agency responsible for al-Awlaki's killing—which everyone knows was the CIA. A disheartening conclusion: "Although it is widely known that the C.I.A. operates drones, including from a base in Saudi Arabia, and that it participated in the operation that killed Mr. Awlaki, the Obama administration still officially treats that information as secret."

### III

Nor is it especially forthcoming about the mass collection of facial recognition data. We return to Risen and Proteus and the discussion of an NSA practice that is not really new, only newly revealed—be it noted—through the Snowden disclosures (their import, more vital, in exposing government usurpation than ever thought possible). The reporters state that NSA "is harvesting huge numbers of images of people from communications that it intercepts through its global surveillance operations for use in sophisticated facial recognition programs, according to top-secret



documents.” As indicated before, no area of human identity is safe from government spying. To see a brief list of sources is to gain a sense of the range of surveillance. They write: “The spy agency’s reliance on facial recognition technology has grown significantly over the last four years as the agency has turned to new software to exploit the flood of images included in emails, text messages, social media, videoconferences and other communications, the N.S.A. documents reveal.” (Without Snowden’s revelations, here as with so much else, we would be in the dark, which government, demonstrated by its actions, prefers, the attacks on him from Obama down showing the fear of revelations.) For NSA, technology summons the future—perhaps why I thought of the title, techno-fascism, as though a window had been opened to the utter destruction of privacy, and for Obama, particularly, a pseudo-sophisticated concept of warfare, in effect, that pushing buttons can rule the world. They observe further: “Agency officials believe that technological advances could revolutionize the way that the N.S.A. finds intelligence targets around the world, the documents show. The agency’s ambitions for this highly sensitive ability and the scale of its effort have not previously been disclosed.”

What are we speaking of? “The agency intercepts ‘millions of images per day’—including about 55,000 ‘facial recognition quality images,’” an NSA document summarizes from 2011, as part of enlarging “its mission of tracking suspected terrorists” in what amounts to a dystopian wave-of-the-future position. A 2010 document calls for adopting a “full-arsenal approach,” beyond “traditional communications,” so as to include “biographic and biometric information,” the latter especially not unlike what had been heard in the eugenics movement at the turn of the last century. Whatever the surveillance methods of choice, the act itself does not change, nor the permissiveness of acting: “It is not clear how many people around the world, and how many Americans, might have been caught up in the effort. Neither federal privacy laws nor the nation’s surveillance laws provide specific protections for facial images.” But the phrase of choice in these operations, from whatever source, is SCOOP UP, in turn giving on to a sense of range and scope: “Given the N.S.A.’s foreign intelligence mission, much of the imagery would involve people overseas whose data was scooped up through cable taps, Internet hubs and satellite transmissions.” We expect this from the bulk collection of metadata, but THIS is somehow different, a stripping away of identity per se. A wondrous world of possibilities for repression awaits, as a Carnegie Mellon researcher perhaps unwittingly describes: “There are still technical limitations [on the total erosion of privacy], but the computational power keeps growing, and the databases keep growing, and the algorithms keep improving.”

It is fair to say that NSA joins CIA, FBI, FISA Court—but why stop there?—president, Congress, judiciary (with few exceptions), in hunting down human aspiration and social democracy as threats to an America determined to keep its priorities straight: the greatest military the world has ever seen, increasing class differentiation with concentrated wealth confined to a numerically infinitesimal upper group matched symmetrically by a disproportionately growing underclass (a perfect pyramid in the making), and to fill in what is becoming essentially a moral void, a flourishing authoritarianism taking form and expression in global hegemony, intervention, counterrevolution. Painless, at least to the American people, should techno-fascism have its way—with, of course, one catch: fascism of every sort becomes self-devouring, hatred of others, either because they’re different or fail to see the splendiferous light about America, is finally channeled inward as self-hatred, something all of the surveillance and images cannot prevent and probably only accelerate.

MY New York Times Comment on the Risen-Poitras article, same date, follows:

Facial recognition data—in the words of Joseph Welch to Joe McCarthy, “Have you no shame, sir?”, applies equally today, if not more so, addressed to NSA under precisely the same circumstances: the abrogation of American civil liberties.

What is this country coming to? A Surveillance State, National Security State, and, if a may, proto-Totalitarian State—for what else can be said of a government sponsoring the total destruction of privacy of its own people, and attempting the same for the world?

In a society where such destruction is passively accepted—an outrageous assault on human dignity, people simply taking it, is another useful description of totalitarianism. All three branches of government are complicit, each in its own way, in this assault on human dignity. Political party, here bipartisan consensus; Executive, integral part of Obama’s enlargement of power; judiciary, FISAC a travesty, Supreme Court culpable in allowing an/or promoting the invasion of rights.

Facial recognition data merely the next step in a cumulative series of abuses accompanied by the supineness of government to check its own USURPATION. There appear to be no checks left, leaving the nation defenseless against its own inner devils, starting from a pathological anticommunism that has morphed into counterterrorism, with a heavy dose of militarism, xenophobia, and resentment about facing the challenges of a now multipolar world.

A decentralized world structure is seen as abhorrent.

JUNE 5, 2014

### **Obama’s “Twofer” Policy**

Welcome Mr. President to Warsaw, we have a stellar roster to greet you on Legacy Week, where all the Fascist groups from World War 2, those still extant or their heirs, have sent representatives to greet you, Svoboda, Right Sector, leading the charge in Kiev (which you so kindly supported), to the Romanian Iron Guard—freedom fighters all, now united by their common hatred of Russia (and the prospect of further American military and financial largesse). We welcome the American presence on our soil to preserve the security, honor, and integrity of Eastern Europe, airfields complete with fighter groups, troops, the amassing of NATO forces, missile installations, anti-missile installations, training bases to beef up our own military and paramilitary operations—and, Mr. President, if we’ve left anything out in our First Line of Defense to keep the American Homeland safe, such as nuclear stockpiles at-the-ready, please tell us. We want more than anything to be a vast arsenal (FDR spoke of the “Arsenal of Democracy,” which to us sounds a mite suspicious—we want to be the “Arsenal of Capitalism” and bask in your esteem and favor).

You no doubt have a busy schedule, but with the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact and its reprobativestance on international politics (starting with ingratitude over US leadership and American defined- and implemented-globalization), this goodwill trip to fill the ideological-economic vacuum with the values of democracy, market fundamentalism, humanitarian interventionism (as here) is beyond words so deeply appreciated. We realize our insignificance in

the Great Chain of (Capitalist) Being, but your desire to aid in our struggle against godless communism, socialism, and, pardon our reference to that most terrible of conditions known to humankind, PEACE, has made us staunch friends and allies for life. Putin is Satan, if not worse. He devours little children for breakfast, stops the bombing of Syria for lunch, and acts as a counterweight to American global hegemony for dinner; the first though unproven is useful for exciting the populace to adopt a permanent war psychology, the second, an affront to diplomatic niceties, and the third, wholly unwarranted interference of selfless actions of The Greatest Nation on Earth.

Rest assured, the New York Times, as in Peter Baker's article, "Obama, in Warsaw, Pledges Solidarity With Eastern Europe," (June 3), is with you step-by-step in America's much anticipated confrontation with Russia. He writes: "President Obama announced more steps on Tuesday to bolster security in central and eastern Europe with additional deployments and training as he arrived in Poland for the start of a four-day European trip aimed at locking arms with allies following Russia's intervention in Ukraine." No mistake about it, LOCKING ARMS is what American diplomacy is all about, as befitting the nation reaching out (down?) from the practice and fact of unilateralism. Perhaps Baker takes his eye off the ball because this is exactly what Obama did weeks ago in his Pacific Rim military-diplomatic journey: locking arms with friends and allies for purposes of the encirclement, containment, isolation, ultimately, the hoped-for implosion or actual hostilities directed to that end, not, in that case, of Russia, but China—the Obama twofer policy, pressure of every description short of war, thus far, treating both China and Russia alike from the same starting point and seeking the same outcome.

The starting point: carefully crafted political-military alliances, backed by joint maneuvers, funding of the military and intelligence capabilities of each of the partners, and mutually beneficial (presumably) trade relations and investment opportunities, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, in one case, Obama's negotiations to the same end in forming an anti-Russian coalition. Seeking the same outcome: in the face of a multipolar world structure of power because of Russia and China, the return to an international context in which the US in fact possessed disproportionate power leading to its unilateral dominance in all areas, military, political, economic, ideological, whatever reinforces hegemonic status. Neither set of global aspirations is possible without the other, dominance itself (or Obama's reiterated word "leadership" at West Point) an uncontested given. Obama brought to Warsaw full-dress Exceptionalism pointed toward Moscow for effect, but also to gladden the hearts of his hosts: intervention, fighter jets, cyberespionage, all on order as or when needed, along with less conventional means of cheering up what famously had been termed decades ago, the Captive Nations. This trip had for its larger purpose to light a fire under the Cold War, lest it no longer serve the capacious maw of militarism, the "defense" industries on which it thrived, and the domestic brainwashing ideal for its continuance.

Obama, the jaunty bringer of glad tidings—for as Baker writes: "Mr. Obama tried to make a point of demonstrating solidarity with leaders of Poland and the rest of the region immediately upon landing. Striding across the tarmac from Air Force One, he visited a hangar with four American F-16 fighter jets and addressed about 50 American and Polish airmen and soldiers with a message of resolve." Never mind the US jets in Polish hangars, the atmosphere ("a message of resolve") is reminiscent of wartime. Obama's own words (even his passing reference to the domino theory) set the mood, firming up allies for the struggle to follow: "I'm starting the visit here because our

commitment to Poland's security as well as the security of our allies in central and eastern Europe is a cornerstone of our own security and is sacrosanct. As friends and allies, we stand united together and forever." This, to the troops, with the president of Poland, Bronislaw Komorowski, beside him.

Do I exaggerate the militarism, the anti-Russian meaning and intent, the means of creating a context in which war itself is both possible and practical? Here is Baker again, surely not a hostile critic of the administration. The details are fascinating (and not so different from promises and arrangements made in the Pacific): "He later announced that he would ask Congress for \$1 billion for a 'European reassurance initiative' that would increase exercises, training and troop presence in Eastern Europe and send American navy ships more often to the Baltic and Black seas. The plan would deploy American experts to bolster capabilities and would help pre-position equipment among European allies for quicker military responses. It would also provide aid to Ukraine and two other former Soviet republics, Georgia and Moldova." It is "help pre-position equipment...for quicker military responses" which no doubt gets Putin's attention, the Ogre with Red Army troops swarming over Europe, to be resisted on the beaches of Long Island or Hilton Head—no, don't think so, the threat possibly being the other way around, Obama the Man of Peace loaded down with grenades ready to toss.

Envious of others who enjoy America's full military protection, the Polish foreign minister said (in a telephone interview with Baker): "America, we hope, has ways of reassuring us that we haven't even thought about. There are major bases in Britain, in Spain, in Portugal, in Greece, in Italy. WHY NOT HERE?" (my caps.) Ghoulish, on the verge of proto-fascism (especially "that we haven't even thought about"), I think, yes. And this was before Obama's arrival; what was said after, is anyone's guess. To the airmen, part of a full-time Air Force detachment in Poland since 2012, he added: "Poles and Americans stand shoulder to shoulder for freedom. And we're so grateful to all of you for your service." This would be a busy time, delivering the same message of standing shoulder to shoulder for freedom "with the leaders of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia, all of whom are traveling here to see the American president." The roster of leaders in the Pacific was shorter, the message, though, the same.

My New York Times Comment on Baker's article, same date, follows:

Obama has brilliantly fused anticommunism and counterterrorism into a fascistic cocktail worthy of US desires to maintain unilateral global hegemony. Just as his recent Pacific Rim visit, which, along with TPP, is intended to contain, isolate, and drastically weaken China, his Warsaw excursion, as described, reeks with the none-too-subtle desire to reawaken a Cold War that in fact never ended. Russia is NOT communist, yet the anticommunism theme on the subliminal level—Putin as Stalin in modern dress—is being invoked to encircle Russia just as the Pacific-first strategy does, in China.

This escalation also means more military appropriations, more interventions, joint-maneuvers, bankrolling of other nations' militaries—as meanwhile, massive surveillance at home, rotting infrastructure, inadequate social safety net. Obama, the toast of Right Sector and Svoboda in Kiev and similar fascistic remnants of World War 2 throughout Eastern Europe, no longer, remnants, however, because with US assistance, part of the governing groups which stacked together shows a thirst for confrontation with Russia.

America thrives on war to keep its juices running. Else why let Obama's vulgar militarism translate into favorable approval ratings? By all means, beef up forces in the region. We're getting impatient—start the Conflict, even if it means nuclear annihilation on both sides. We seem entrapped by a gigantic death-wish, an impulse to self- and others' destruction.

JUNE 6, 2014

### **Obama, Global Warmonger**

Thanatos hangs over America, a death-wish based on the inner rotting of conscience predicated on the constant need for supremacy in the world as a test, indeed validation, of the nation's moral virtue, to be achieved through military power—a greatness no longer assumed and, because of inner decay setting in, cause for fatalistic entropic reaction. Circa 1950: Better dead than red. Circa 2014: Better dead than descend from the pinnacle of global hegemony—and why not bring everyone else with us? Paul Craig Roberts's article in *CounterPunch*, *Are You Ready For Nuclear War?*, (June 3), may perhaps seem unduly alarmist to the uninitiated, but even without Obama-Team national security advisers thoroughly capable of and attuned to such planning, there are indications inhering in Obama's studied moves aimed toward direct confrontation with Russia and China that carry intentionally the eventuality of a nuclear showdown.

Both on the Pacific Rim and European trips, closely integrated in time and purpose, Obama sounds like—and is scripted to be—the Avenger against a doubting world, not sufficiently appreciative of America the Land of Freedom (subtext throughout, of course, capitalism the sole legitimate world system replicating America's own political-economic structure and ideological values). Comparing his statements wherever he appeared on those journeys of confidence-building, all to the end of confrontation with China and Russia, respectively, yet tacitly as though enemies-joined-at-the-hip, he sounded like nothing so much as a broken 78 rpm recording, stand shoulder to shoulder, stand shoulder to shoulder, stand shoulder... ad infinitum. Poland, South Korea, Latvia and Lithuania, Philippines—the more the merrier, coupled with checks (the monetary kind) for military hardware, promises of American protection, assurances, backed by military bases, training programs, joint exercises, membership in the extant alliance system (an attack on one is an attack on all), the foregoing packaged with the ascription of Russia and China as expansion-minded and out to do harm to its neighbors (i.e., our “friends and allies”). Chuck Hagel, interviewed on BBC, invoked Article 5 of the NATO treaty, the one for all, all for one provision, stating that “Russia was a threat” to Europe (June 5). Nothing could be clearer.

And then we have Obama in Brussels, same day, demanding of Putin, in a time frame “over the next two, three, four weeks,” complete disengagement—in Peter Baker's words, from his *New York Times* article, “With Group of 7 Backing, Obama Gives Russia One-Month Ukraine Deadline,” (June 5)—from Ukraine, that is, “to reverse its intervention...and help quash a pro-Russian separatist uprising or else...it would face international sanctions far more severe than anything it had endured so far.” Beyond a time frame, actually an ultimatum, Obama stated that “if Russia's provocations continue, it's clear from our discussions here that the G-7 nations are ready to impose additional costs on Russia.” No compliance after the time period (“and if he remains on the current course”), watch out Putin, for “we've already indicated what kinds of actions that we're prepared to take.”

G-7 on banners, rostrums, a deliberate flaunting of exclusion, along with D-Day Observance plans to prevent an Obama-Putin head-to-head, calculated further to enhance antagonism, this choreographed trip is a prelude to bolder demands directed to the EU itself to speak with one voice, that of America's, in viewing Russia as an enemy bent on invasion of the West. Rather than hysteria, the mood favors an incremental rise in tensions, at each step, the concretization of war readiness, naval forces in the Black Sea, a larger US troop presence in Poland, the steady movement eastward to the Russian border of NATO troops, anti-ballistic missile installations ringing Russia, a hostile environment, to say the least, for a peaceful accommodation, one the US and the EU, by their actions, appears not to want.

I am tempted to explain these developments as the psychopathology of capitalism as a system, thanatos the upshot of the desensitization of human feeling when the commodity structure defines the individual as alienated from social relations of equality and justice, in favor of a pervasive solipsism, driven by fear, introjecting the values of ruling groups as compensation for empty lives, turning on one another to rise in the social hierarchy, in the last analysis, killing without compunction, as in Obama's signature, drone assassination vaporizing a fellow human being so that no reminder of his/her existence remains. But such an explanation is too simple by half; policy trumps psychology, or rather invites a particular mental-set in order to reach fruition. Thanatos is consequence, not cause. Policy is about market penetration, market fundamentalism, market hegemony, to which must be appended the full-scale militarization of political economy, value system, how order is maintained and reinforced.

Mass surveillance in America is less if at all about counterterrorism than about the artificial props which are necessary to keep society from disintegrating in the face of animalistic greed (apologies to animals for the reference), ethnocentric and racial assumptions, the uneven structure of wealth, an underlying repression insinuated into the fabric of status, power, and wealth for purposes of the stabilization of privilege and recognition. America enjoyed world prestige for so long that a decline of any sort is catastrophic. My way or the highway works only so long; as this realization sinks in, America becomes more dangerous. These provocative moves to mount a massive counterrevolution are failing, whether Putin or Xi or both, the counterweight is fast forming its leadership coming from the people themselves with Russia and China the historical vanguard for creating a world system where no single power is able to dominate and unilaterally shape the destinies of humankind.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker article, same date, follows:

I am delighted by Obama's rhetoric emanating out of Warsaw and Brussels. It confirms my sense of him as global WARMONGER No. 1. His threats, boasts, needling are an accurate reflection of his and the US's character. We hear rumors now of a veritable cottage industry in Washington of policy wonks working out nuclear first-strike paradigms against Russia and China. Fitting, because the impulse for destruction is present. Obama is far more dangerous with or without preemptive war than any POTUS perhaps ever.

Does saying that make me a red-pinko-commie? No. Until America puts its own house in order, which may well be never again, criticism is justified without necessarily praising those declared to be adversaries and worse.

How square peace with massive domestic surveillance? with the largest military budget in the world? with the use of counterterrorism to violate civil liberties at home, mount unjustified aggression abroad?

Times readers may scream (one yesterday said of my post on Warsaw, Go back to Russia—I'll donate to your travel)! That's perfect, the ratcheting up of Reaction, frighteningly similar to McCarthyism—even more pervasive—that I remember in my youth.

As for a Putin-Poroshenko meeting, it will come about soon. As for Obama's threat of sectoral sanctions, this will backfire, as Germany and France will not go along. It is fitting Obama has Cameron as his new pal—two peas in a pod. Others however will resent the crass bullying. We deserve Obama.

JUNE 11, 2014

### **Permeation of the Fascist Mindset**

Fascism in America is neither pure conjecture nor irresponsible name-calling. Its presence is manifest in numerous ways, from the Executive Power of a president to fight a two-front war on behalf of global domination, at home, unprecedented massive surveillance on the American people (with the chilling effect, slowly taking form, of silencing or narrowing the bounds of dissent), and abroad, itself two-pronged, a geopolitical paradigm, backed by (also unprecedented) military power, designed to weaken drastically both Russia and China through encirclement, containment, finally, economic and diplomatic neutralization as a factor in world politics.

Preeminence/hegemony has never been enough, since perhaps the conclusion of World War 2, for this global status had to be enjoyed unilaterally AND in a way that is intended to humiliate all potential or actual challengers, conveniently set against each other in a political-ideological dichotomization of the international system. The Cold War is largely America's creation to achieve these purposes, inaugurated in the Pacific, months earlier, with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan (itself a warning to Russia in Manchuria and indigenous Left forces in China), and, in Europe, as set against a nearly prostrate Soviet Union amidst a Continent of devastation and rubble, the politicized use of food aid and economic assistance, culminating in the Marshall Plan two years later, to defeat indigenous Left forces in that region.

By 1950 America like previous Imperial historical ascendancies entered its own Age of Counterrevolution as the logical and necessary step to its consolidation of power, a reactive/defensive posture integral to seemingly progressive determinants of growth. Trade-and-investment expansion, cultural-ideological influence, a reputation for democracy, freedom, and social justice (never earned or justified in practice), all combined—the shadow of military prepotency hanging over the whole, except for the Korean War and countless smaller-scale interventions bringing it into the open—to give the impression of dynamism so often linked in popular thought with liberalism and Progress. A reverse dynamism is more like it, as though to be active is per se to be on the side of humanity (and deeper still, dynamism conveys force), which prejudices the content of action, assisted by the numbing and authoritarian consequences on the public mind that force induces in the personality, what Adorno and others showed in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) to be the character of authoritarian submission. The timing is

significant, a prescient analysis in the take-off period, where liberalism wraps around an increasingly fascistic industrial-military structure, giving it democratic credentials and a clean bill of health as it seeks world dominance.

In this regard, McCarthyism and generalized anticommunism (which includes xenophobia and, with Taft-Hartley, the assault on labor organization) during the period and carried forward to the present under various guises, causes, and labels, is secondary and reinforcing to the main stem of repression and ideological closure in America, liberalism, loosely construed to embrace corporatism in American finance and industry, while the Right, thoroughly unsophisticated in the ways and needs of advanced capitalism, rebels at the regulatory framework monopoly capital erects for its protection via government-business interpenetration.

Today, Obama is the liberal champion of fascism, American-style. Massive surveillance is a surrogate for the concentration camp. Glenn Greenwald in *No Place to Hide* states what should have been said at the start in the reporting of Snowden's disclosures: the chilling effect of surveillance on the American people as perhaps the primary intent of the NSA program, with counterterrorism a pretext for immobilizing the will for authentic democratic social change.

POTUS provides the rug under which is swept every noxious element of public policy, from deregulation, wealth concentration, and protection of business illegality and worse, in domestic affairs, and in foreign affairs an aggressive world posture of confrontation, intervention, regime change, and assassination, coupled with or accompanied by commercial-financial agreements for the maximization of US capitalist expansion. Pacific-first strategy and TransPacific Partnership, shoring up EU/NATO and precipitating conflict in Ukraine, these are the more obvious pursuits of a unitary policy of the militarization of the political economy for the totalization of America's global power.

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To illustrate the essential hypothetical, permeation of the fascist mindset in America, permit me to indulge in conjecture (itself the essence of hypothetical reasoning) in which, I believe, the foregoing is an accurate historical base from which the projection of fascist trends in society and the body politic is not unreasonable. My purpose is not satire (an easy escape from hard analysis) but an imaginative scenario of what portends if the military-financial trajectory of American capitalism is followed, as now seems to be the case.

American youth appear bewildered, clueless about the enforced compartmentalization of foreign and domestic policy, and even on the latter, beguiled by a POTUS incapable of treachery to working people, minorities, and youth (the newly-announced policy on making student loans less onerous will still fill the coffers of the banks), for an African-American would NEVER side with ruling groups, including military and intelligence elites, against the poor and currents of societal democratization in all facets of life. In foreign policy, the same: humanitarian interventionism is taken largely at face value, and even when not, hardly as important an area of well-being to American and world society as being politically correct on the culture wars (on which Obama fails even there, given his obsequious accommodation to Rightist views on gun control, abortion, etc.), not to say the nuts-and-bolts of hegemony itself, from Treasury policy to paramilitary operations, nuclear modernization, and prosecution of whistleblowers.



I confine my speculation to youth, basking in a self-imposed blissful ignorance, trained in the finer points of consumerism, chained to their assorted means of contact with the outside world, affording neither the room for interior emotional and intellectual development nor the satisfaction of intimate human contact. Privatism confronts a world of strangers; no wonder the indifference to the fate of others. The killing of children through collateral damage; the money and arms to overthrow elected governments; saturation bombing, as in shock and awe, to soften the Enemy—all of this happens to the other guy, miles away, no concern of ours. I envision then, a decade from now, as the summation of trends I have described, of the youth organized, wholly contrived, yet with the aura of spontaneity, of the YFA, Young Fascists of America, ages 14 through 22, with younger age groups internalizing more subtly the goals of nationalism, militarism, capitalism, ideal preparation, step-by-step, for entrance into the world of global leadership.

This need not be under government sponsorship, but rather at one step removed, the increasing role of NGOs in conducting state business (affording government deniability) while benefiting from off-budget appropriations from delegated government agencies, probably State, Treasury, CIA, and for absorbing or quelling workers' discontent abroad, Labor and DOJ. YFA would find friends in high places, ranging from (based on existing sources) such organizations as Freedom House (and multiple think tanks similar in purpose), the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Federalist Society, to the Democratic National Committee and the revitalization of ADA. The key to youth ideological regimentation, as for society at large, is to keep liberalism front and center, what one might term, the liberalization of militarism, in order to salve injured consciences (if any there be) and disarm world opinion as the troops, private contractors, and investment bankers march in.

Obama is a prime signifier of what the future, even in the near-term (say, a decade) holds, for his Pacific Rim, West Point, and D-Day European trips already suggest, America is maneuvering into confrontation with China (his emphasis) and Russia (that of the foreign-policy establishment), awaiting the first pretext offered for a still unspecified level of military engagement which neither he nor his national security advisers shies away from, including nuclear war. Yes, 2014, not 2024, for staring into the ABYSS. For now, every means is taken to humiliate Putin (Ukraine) and Xi (cyber-espionage), in the hope they will take the bait. Whether the “soft footprint,” short of large-scale intervention and war, or preemptive nuclear strikes, Obama stays on talking point, recognizing that liberal internationalism (for the century past, beginning with Wilson) is the ideological paradigm of choice for waging armed conflict, enlisting the support on the home front while obfuscating the aims and purposes of foreign engagement to friend and foe alike.

Regrettably, this is true only up to a point. Unlike in Wilson's time, despite the slogan of making the world safe for democracy, or maybe because of the thought behind it, that the world is worth saving, a cataclysmic social vision had been ruled out—and that, not because nuclear weapons were not present, but because utter nihilistic thinking, even were the prospect of the decline of capitalism imminent (which it was not), was still rejected as unworthy of Western civilization, philosophy, and geostrategic planning. Spengler was conspicuous for his failure. Now, Spenglerians cum Strangelovians are high in the saddle; thermonuclear obliteration of all perceived adversaries seems a more permanent solution to capitalist difficulties and emotionally captivating.

This is today, epitomized in the dystopian phenomenon of drone assassination. (In the recent prisoner exchange, Kerry hinted that the five Taliban members released could be subject to this fate.) Not even a decade hence. Do our political leaders, intelligence experts, military commanders

play too many video games, confusing life in real time with personal amusement, or are the games meant to collapse the two (“bombers” sitting in air-conditioned comfort in Nevada, pressing a button and vaporizing an individual 8,000 miles away), so that war, murder, rapine become so impersonalized as to completely trivialize the killing of human beings? Have simulations of absolute destruction inured us to dangers of annihilation? It is wrong to assign causative value to the instruments we create; unlike Marx’s commodity fetishism they do not tyrannize over us. It is we who press the button.

I have commented before on Thanatotic seizure of the American imagination as the nation experiences its evolving decline (visit Detroit today as a glimpse of the future), a Freudian instinctual wish for death now contending with and all but trumping Eros, the outcome daily—with each new intervention, each new hedge-fund billionaire, each new dozens, hundreds, thousands falling into the American underclass—shifting in favor of the former. No, hardly habituation to video games; rather, our conduct and values appear to welcome the end, just so it’s done in high definition full color accompanied by a majestic anthem, these games being only a side order in the grand banquet of militarized cannibalism. The nation’s ruling groups, joined by the people, appear to welcome a definitive resolution of the decline of America. Thanks to the sanitization of war and killing at the hands of the propaganda of patriotism and the glamour of high-tech performance, the more ghoulish the more respectable become the practices—again, drone assassination, carrying a presidential imprimatur, says it all. To vaporize human beings in high tech fashion, similar to the technological achievement that allows NSA to conduct massive surveillance on the American people, speaks volumes about the soporiferous climate created by a totalitarian context, even now, in the present-day society, which utilizes technology for geopolitical and social-control ends.

Let’s not forget my imaginative scenario: ten years from now, YFA to emulate the values of their elders and replicate the preceding history of war, intervention, surveillance, as carrying forward the fascist mindset into the American future. Come with me into the scene, for like Hitler’s “Strength through Joy” movement, aimed in this case particularly at the youth, as a vanguard group, we see fitness as a national priority, taking the form, beyond athletics, of political exercise of a more untoward kind: beginning with uniforms, arm bands, torchlight parades through working class, minority, and immigrant neighborhoods, then turned specifically to incendiary attacks on radicals, stoning of women who seek independent selfhood, and VIOLENCE as standard practice to be directed against critics, dissenters, any and all known to object to intervention, abridgment of the right of privacy, social injustice, gross class differences of wealth and power, in sum, malcontents presumptively under the control of a foreign government.

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Our hypothetical YFA will have arrived none too soon circa 2024, because some Americans, perhaps a considerable number, still value even now the Bill of Rights, concepts of rule of law and public welfare, and what soon may become other outmoded articles of faith in democratic government, all of which must be eradicated if monopoly capital is to realize what it takes to be its consummate promise: not democracy, but hierarchy, class-defined power, status, and privilege, effected on a permanent stabilized basis which forecloses alternative forms of social organization and paths of development. Toward a future America, what shall be sought, if the present is any indication, and radicalism does not rise to the challenge, is a citizenry in which no middle way is found between the absolutisms of Good and Evil, the former identified with the status quo in its full

Rightist proportions, and the latter, all else that a patriotic ethnocentric, xenophobic mind can conjure up, including but not limited to radicalism, because all dissent, libertarian, vegetarian, you name it, will be feared and wherever possible laid to rest.

The Manichaeism epistemology, you're for us or against us, no middle ground, the dualism as certificate of good conduct or Enemy of the State, already the operable methodology of Obama and his DOJ, is the seedbed which will blossom forth over time—a relatively quick time. One can foresee—I exaggerate? perhaps—banning Emerson and Thoreau for holding up the image of the autonomous individual, giant bonfires banning Marx for exposing the foundations and inner structure of capitalism, banning even the Beatles' records because there might be hidden meanings in the lyrics.

Satire? Call it instead a projection of existing givens—trends clear to those not already brainwashed, from escalation of war-making activities, counterrevolutionary in spirit and purpose, to the eradication of privacy of the individual on a global basis, and in-between, the stabilization of a world system of capitalism modeled in all particulars after that of America's. GM, JPMorganChase, Boeing, Monsanto, these exemplify what the world can expect from corporate guidance in fashioning a well-regulated social order where everyone knows his/her place in a pecking order of Liberal Totalitarianism, the wave of the future! Should the world refuse this invitation to American-style happiness, contentment, and assured superiority, hierarchically arranged, by class, race, nation, then divine retribution would surely follow, God's instrument being US military-financial-commercial power, poised On High, to vanquish all nonbelievers, via nuclear war in the face of stubbornness or ignorance. YFA, if it came to pass, would be ready and willing to aid in this enterprise, in fact, its existence would be for that purpose.

No, not hooligans, that would be too simple by half. Dressed in black suit and tie, when that knock on the door comes, even in the middle of the night, don't be alarmed, I caution my fellow citizens of the future, its members merely out selling cookies, not the kind attached to Internet servers, but genetic modified ones baked in the famous Monsanto kitchens, in several kinds, the historical series a best-seller, named for and carrying the autograph on the box of several bygone heroes: Brennan, Clapper, Kerry, Obama the premium item, red-white-and-blue, at modest extra cost. Eat and be merry, things, I want to assure them, could be worse. If so, I'm not exactly sure how.

JUNE 13, 2014

### **The Convergence of Capitalism, Anti-Radicalism, and War**

Nothing has changed since 1945 (if not, indeed, still earlier), the aftermath of World War Two the consolidation of a position of world dominance, facilitated by global devastation virtually everywhere else, and, with that opening, the push for a viral anticommunism at home based on conjuring a false threat in order to turn the screws of domestic ideological and political repression. Within a decade of the raw harshness of McCarthyism/Taft-Hartley, symbolized by the execution of the Rosenbergs and the radical cleansing of the labor and civil-rights movements, we see the Official Line of geniality at home and humanitarianism abroad, both of which marking the already circumscribed boundaries to political-intellectual-literary discourse and social change itself. Democratization in America and its US projection overseas became the more meaningless the more

it was bruited about, starting with Eisenhower-Kennedy and coalesced in bipartisan continuity ever since.

There are no real exceptions, party struggles themselves an in-house affair purportedly addressed to the dangers of International Communism as rather, the cudgel, to knock down domestic radicalism and keep the public in line. That is what I mean by a “static order,” not CONSENSUS as popularized at mid-century by Hofstadter, Lipset, and liberal academic culture, but an imposed, pressurized closure of thought which marshaled all of the incentives America had to offer, carrot-and-stick, to keep monopoly capital and global market expansion on track. And by “historical recapitulation” I mean, we are back in the 1950s, internalized restraint, false consciousness in the acceptance of hegemonic goals, war-readiness at a finger snap, now however with the assist of technological means to exert far tighter social control over the life and thought of the nation, combined with still greater habituation—after decades of war, intervention, propaganda—to the idea and practice of America’s version of global leadership.

Why even pursue the analysis? In part, historical recapitulation is DOA in an international framework of multipower states, clearly aware of and no longer acquiescent in the exercise of US unrestrained power. The world has changed. Despite, or perhaps because of, America’s nuclear arsenal, and its infantile urge to have its way in all things, Russia and China—here US geostrategic thinking and planning are correct in identifying them as alternative power centers, yet, I submit, wrong in deterministically conceiving them as Adversaries to-the-death—are obviously leading counterweights to its demand for global hegemony, with even the EU beginning to chafe at the prospect of being drawn into an American-led confrontation with Russia of unspecified as yet scale and lethality. Too, other countries now are contributing to the decentralizing of the world power structure, Latin America, led by Brazil, coming out from under as not before, and, in general, the entire Third World, IMF notwithstanding, is feeling its oats.

The danger of historical recapitulation in a changing world power system is that for the US acting with impunity is no longer an option, yet to make it so—the clear intent of Obama, his national-security advisers, the military and intelligence communities, and, I speak advisedly, the whole of major American capitalism—it becomes increasingly necessary both to engage more forcefully and expand the sphere of engagement. Adversaries become Enemies, even Mortal Enemies, and whereas in the first stages of the Cold War Russia had pride of place in US crosshairs, with China, to be condemned, and seemingly fought outside the Cold War umbrella, as in Korea and Vietnam, China is presently of coequal status with Russia as the Devil Incarnate. Hence, expand the military, with bases encircling the Major Threats, set traps to smoke them out (Ukraine and Japan as stalking horses, respectively) to America’s supposed military advantage, and create a receptive atmosphere at home, if not of war, then of SILENCE. Massive surveillance has a way, ultimately, of neutralizing dissent, the proverbial look-over-the-shoulder now extended to the telephone, the Internet, an ever-enlarging schema of communications’ targets.

This is not Cold War Two, but, with minor fits and starts, a continuation of the original social-economic-political-structural framework. American capitalism has not changed, only intensified its inner logic of consolidation and imperatives for international growth and expansion, in which case, why should the US global posture change? It hasn’t, and instead, because of the static social order, where the degradation of labor is mated with hitherto unparalleled wealth-concentration, law, custom, ideology all sanction a process enshrining the status quo as a finely tuned engine of

exploitation. Obama still wears the mask behind which McCarthy hides (or doesn't hide so much as let POTUS carry water for him—or his spirit), providing another link in the historical chain of Exceptionalism—seemingly-by-divine-right, a still more exaggerated claim to world moral superiority because under the systemic strain of imperial decline.

America has rejected the challenge of self-democratization, favoring instead, as much by choice as by a societal process of capitalist development (of which the choice is, in fact, a nondeterministic, and for that reason, one more noxious and questionable, leading preference in such a context), a modernized version of classic fascism—internal pacification, outward expansion, the first achieved through social control, the second, market fundamentalism, in both cases, seemingly NORMAL, the key to what I term liberal stabilization and/or liberal militarization (which already contains the element of stabilization) of American life, thought, and culture. Even this week, daily signs the bridge is falling down: schoolchildren hostage to American insanity of gun violence; ISIS military gains in Iraq, calling into question the whole record of American intervention and the untold misery it has created for peoples who never asked for its “liberating” effects; and the latest titillation in American politics, Eric Cantor's defeat in the Virginia Republican primary. The last-named seems for the moment to outshine all other news, the New York Times, in its editorial, “In G.O.P., Far Right Is Too Moderate,” (6-12), claiming the high ground of liberal lamentation for the sorry pickle the party is in, when in reality, it, as always, misses deliberately the contours of the political-ideological landscape, by shielding Obama and the Democrats from what is, at best, the quasi-permanent synthesis of capitalism, anti-radicalism, and war defining bipartisan accord on the essentials of USG policy.

My Comment on the NYT editorial, same date, follows:

As usual, NYT persists in dichotomizing the American party system when in fact Republicans and Democrats remain essentially the same: a self-devouring Exceptionalism of pathological xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and war-mindedness. You ask, will Cantor “and other members of the [Republican] leadership be replaced by even more divisive politicians determined to stage confrontations with the president at every juncture?” Good question, wrong (implied) answer.

First, the result is not internal to the Republican party. The entire political spectrum is roaring down a rightward incline. This result merely reflects a society-wide impulse toward fascism. Cantor is swept up in a tide pulling both parties, beyond immigration, toward full acceptance of confrontation toward Russia and China, massive surveillance of the American people, and overwhelming militarism at the expense of, what you ask in your next question (but fail to see the context): “Will they [Republicans] continue to ignore a stagnating economy, inadequate education and decaying cities?” Both parties have allowed militarism to trump these vital needs.

Second then, the confrontation with Obama is fake to miniscule, Obama himself in the forefront in the formation of a National Security State which is draining the lifeblood out of American protestations of democracy. Are “the majority of Americans...appalled by this extremism?” Hardly. Obama's drone assassinations elicit hardly a whimper, likewise, demonizing Putin.

JUNE 16, 2014

## Mississippi Freedom Summer

Looking back a half-century, I don't ask myself, "Was it worth it?" At the time we felt the exhilaration, commitment, dedication, knowing the civil rights movement was America at its finest, a small but highly meaningful step in the cause of humanity in which we were privileged to participate. America was doing to its black population, and had been throughout the course of the nation's history, what it is presently doing to the world: tearing down democracy into shreds, brutalizing people, retarding their growth, superimposing on their lives a paradigm of superiority to which they must, on pain of death, economic dislocation, degradation, readily conform. What we did to ourselves we then projected on the world at large.

Mississippi circa 1964 was Vietnam then, Iraq and Afghanistan later: the steady administration of lascivious force, purposeless humiliation—because we had the power to do so—of others, for systemic ends lost sight of in the long-term obfuscation of meaningful societal conditions and political vocabulary used to describe them. The equation of democracy and capitalism in which they became reciprocally defined, yet democracy wholly subsumed within capitalism, incapable of modifying and in fact extending it, became the overriding political-economic-ideological context through which democracy itself has been transvalued into its opposite: a highly unequal, authoritarian society. So goes Mississippi 1964, so goes America before, then, and since. Democracy is therefore consonant with both the characteristics and practices of capitalism, without sufficient internal criticism to alter what has been an indissoluble connection: characteristics (a hierarchical class system, poverty for a significant number the structural given) and practices (war, intervention, massive "defense" budgets, surveillance now on a heretofore undreamed of scale). These developments in both cases have been conflated into a mush of miasmic false consciousness to the extent that hierarchy, poverty, war are treated as by definition inherently present in democracy. They are democracy in action, capitalism the presiding matrix lost sight of in the process. We have then the reification and presumed cross-fertilization of democracy and capitalism, an unshakable ideological nexus, which historically gives license to the idea of Exceptionalism, an artifice of induced social myopia mentally chaining Americans to the aggressions, at home and abroad, done in their name.

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In celebration? Why the question mark? Nothing can tarnish the quest for social justice it was not only our privilege but solemn obligation to follow. That was then, now is now. Was it worth it? Emphatically yes. But if I knew Barack Obama would be the seeming culmination of the civil-rights struggle, I would have persisted (there was no other choice!), yet turned sharply in criticism once it became apparent (as I did) of the BETRAYAL of the dream. Racial solidarity, that which accounts for most blacks giving Obama a free pass, indeed, taking pride in his and presumably their "arrival," so to speak, is a particular form of false consciousness. Perhaps understandably, it is rooted in the historical dynamics of racial oppression, so that cheering on one's own is perfectly natural. Yet, in this case it proves debilitating, a misplaced trust in the hope a black president, by distilling the knowledge and even the experience of the cruelties directed against the race, would champion social justice for all, generalizing conditions of oppression as a MANDATE for realizing across-the-board equalitarianism in the social order.

This did not happen. Instead, Obama has reversed the historical process of societal democratization. Not only has he taken personal flight from a black identity, except when it suited his political purposes, but he has taken flight from the implied social contract upon which his election was predicated, that of (in the image of Dr. King) promoting the welfare of working people and the poor, an emancipation from politically-economically constructed hardship beyond race as such and related to systemic foundations having relevance to war and intervention, as well as reducing inequitable domestic policies intensifying wealth-concentration, corporate dominance of public policy, environmental spoliation, etc. His direct contribution (the reversal I spoke of) to advanced capitalism, the fact of, and symbol for, the retardation of human promise and potentiality in the material and moral development of the world community, not least the American struggle to maintain global supremacy without concession to an international system based on a de-centered power framework and widening popular expectations and aspirations, places America on continued defensiveness at home.

Witness gaping holes in the social safety net, the fact of, and symbol for, societal deterioration beyond the question of promise and potentiality, reaching out to a proliferation of failures and wrongdoing, as in the fraudulent character of counterterrorism, to shield the government from discovery of its support of domestic corporatism (beginning with monopolization in the industrial and financial sectors) and its conduct of foreign aggression (simultaneous and twin confrontation with Russia and China, requiring a still more distorted capitalist formation, preponderantly weighted to the military). A nation engaged in the massive surveillance of its own people, is hardly a success story. Yet, with the foregoing in mind, the black community (I think inexcusably) and much of white America (which may be par for the course) give Obama a shield of protection—a persistence of false consciousness—of one who has disgraced every fighter, black and white, for a democratic society.

I therefore celebrate the past, Mississippi Freedom Summer, not the present, as represented by Obama, a totalitarian leader who happens to be black (and uses his racial identity skillfully), hand-and-glove with the military and intelligence communities, and comprador, both in objective and social-mental position, except that he is an American intermediary working for American capitalism in the continued promotion of American global hegemony. The conversion of POTUS into CEO of US, Inc., leaving much of America, notably, the black community, behind. This disjunction between Mississippi Freedom Summer and the Obama Administration, in which blacks have been co-opted by a black president, becomes an important object lesson in the use of liberalism for the purposes of social control, liberalism, as the façade for the absorption of dissent through rhetorical blasts of humanitarianism while keeping the power structure intact and solidifying its consolidation still further.

Let me here flesh out what may seem a hidden and certainly controversial premise. Rather than asking that all individuals and groups be free to go their own way (e.g., bottom social groups free to identify with upper groups, even when it is shown that this is harmful to and destructive of their class interest), I submit that oppressed groups have not the luxury of neutrality or false consciousness, as a standard of behavior, which otherwise simply renews their bondage. Instead, they must stand for human freedom, starting with their own or at least not aid and abet its destruction. That is as much a societal as a moral proposition.

I expect persecuted minorities to be in the forefront of human freedom, the very struggle for which they have served as victims and therefore most qualified to know the costs in social-cultural degradation and the most interested party in seeing the rectification of injustice, inequality, and debasement borne out in, and burdens to be lifted from, their lives. Not so, any longer—as though the world had entered a phase of psychopathological reading of victimhood, persecuted now becoming persecutors—not of course the whole black population in America, but the detached group succeeding, against their own people, to join the ranks of oppressors. Obama, more than a servant of power, reveals the mindset of ruling groups to the degree that arm-twisting is not necessary: a true believer of monopoly capital, in power at its sufferance, yet encouraged by his record to be a somewhat independent source of power (knowing full well his sympathies and intentions), and executor of an increasingly broadly-defined militarization of hegemony itself. Trade, finance, IMF, all fine, all traditional methods in seeking market and investment penetration and the extraction of vital raw materials, but, for Obama, not enough. The military component, whether as outright war, intervention, regime change, espionage, subversion, has become self-fulfilling, a coup de grace signifying forcing American capitalist expansion down the throats of the rest of the world.

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Have I strayed from Mississippi Freedom Summer? Only to make the points, first, that there is an absolute disconnect between that experience and Obama's presidency, and second, that his presidency is an enlarged version of Mississippi at that time, his drone assassinations the functional analogue of the murder of Schwerner, Cheney, and Goodman—the arrogance of power which confers the “right” to act with impunity. Their murder is what Mississippi was about then, and what America is about now, a raw core of violence, no longer directed against blacks alone, but as a seething cauldron of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, mixed with a fatal slaver over power converted into authoritarian submission to the powerful (think Stealth bombers in halftime football flyovers), crystallized in the super-patriotism of red-baiting (by whatever name—for it is a generic societal malady—and promiscuous expansion of targets).

I present into evidence of the whole rotten picture of racial injustice, which in combating, these young men gave their lives, this affidavit I gathered from the files of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in Jackson, Mississippi, the nerve-center for Freedom Summer, Bob Moses, director, impressive, more so for his quiet manner of strength—and always, for me, an example of everything Barack Obama is NOT. The torture of Fannie Lou Hamer as a cry of anguish down the years to the present White House, where Obama sits in majestic splendor and military pomp (the presidential helicopter parked in the background for Rose Garden photo-ops), and Bob Moses's unflappable persona, made me realize that from day one in the full operation of the Administration (from Treasury to national-security advisers to CIA) a useful base for comparison had been created, showing the magnitude of Obama's betrayal of black America and, in comparison of other black leaders and activists, from Paul Robeson and A. Philip Randolph to Dr. King, all of whom never flinched in advancing the cause of all PEOPLES, how gross his dereliction of duty and abdication of responsibility on behalf of authentic social-democratic change had been and continues to be.

In the lexicon of American radicalism, as I once learned from research into Populism, where this image stands out, Fannie Lou Hamer's name is or should be Million. She stands for the barbarous treatment of a whole people, and projecting forward, for all those tortured in black-hole prisons



worldwide under US auspices, as well as those daily ground-down in fear and poverty in consequence of America's claims of global hegemony. Mrs. Hamer, the preceding June [1963], was returning from a voter-registration drive in South Carolina on a Continental Trailway's bus to her home in Mississippi. Other members of the party got off at the bus station (facilities in interstate commerce had already been desegregated) and had been denied admission to the "white side"—here the affidavit continues: "I got off the bus and asked them 'what happened.' They said that there were some policemen and highway patrolmen in there. Annelle [Ponder] said policemen with billy-clubs told them to get out of there." They tried to get their badge numbers, "when all five of them were put in the patrol-car, which I think was the highway patrolman car, he also was the one giving orders." (To anyone familiar with the South, the State Highway Patrol, in spiffy military dress, had state-after-state been the leading Authority figures in every way Gestapo-like.)

When Mrs. Hamer left the bus, she was descended on and ordered by a county-deputy into his car: "'[Y]ou are under arrest.' I was going into the car when this [Earl Wane] Patric [the county-deputy] 'kicked me' into the car. While driving me to the jail, they were questioning and calling me 'bitch.'" In the cell, "I could hear screaming and the passing of licks. Pretty soon, I saw several white men bringing Annelle Ponder past my cell—she was holding onto the jail walls—her clothes all torn—her mouth all swelled up and her eyes were all bloody—one eye looking like itself." Then came Mrs. Hamer's turn: "After a while they came for me," three men including the highway patrolman. I should mention, Mrs. Hamer was 46, had infantile paralysis as a child, and was being led away by America's finest. First, the preliminaries, questioning her, "ask[ing] her why I was demonstrating—and said they were not going to have such carryings on in Mississippi." Did you see Dr. King. "I said I could not be demonstrating—I had just got off the bus—and denied that I have seen Martin Luther King. They said 'shut up' and always cut me off. They then asked me where I was from. I said Ruleville. They then left—saying they were going to check it out."

Here I falter, but go on with the description, wishing the account could be crammed down the throat of every faithless leader and national-security flunkey, black and white, but especially Obama and Susan Rice, for using liberal humanitarianism for bring about the same kind of suffering. They returned, one stating: "'You damn right you are from Ruleville. We going to make you wish that you were dead bitch.'" The speaker, John Bassinger, state highway patrolman. What follows, a scene of extreme degradation, blacks ordered to beat Mrs. Hamer (not unlike accounts in the Nazi concentration-camp literature): "When I was brought to another cell I saw two Negroes who were in their 20's or a little younger. John Bassinger—he said 'take this' talking to the youngest Negro. John Bassinger had in his hand a long 2 feet black jack—made out of leather—wider at one end, and one end being filled with something heavy. The young Negro said: 'You mean for me to beat her with this?' John Bassinger said 'You damn right'—'If you don't you know what I will do for you.'"

The beatings began, Mrs. Hamer this place and time, whom else suffered death and broken bodies there before and after, elsewhere before and after, the untold story of racism, war, oppression?—and yet, if any choose to capitalize on Mississippi Freedom Summer at the half-century mark as in some public-relations, perverted, twisted way as to the greatness of America in how much "progress" has been made since then, remind them, starting with Obama, of the death and broken bodies caused by American war and intervention in the name of democracy and freedom. Throw the lie in their faces. She continues: "The young Negro told me to get on the bunk

and he began to beat me. I tried to put my hands to my side where I had polio when I was a child—so that I would not be beat so much on that side. The first Negro beat me until he got tired. Then the second Negro was made to beat me. I took the first part of it, but I couldn't stand the second beating."

America, the majesty of the law, Mrs. Hamer's crime, being active in voter-registration. She later ran for Congress on the Freedom Democratic ticket in Mississippi, the result a foregone conclusion. Her beating is almost exactly one year before the start of Freedom Summer, the movement of young people into the state requiring bravery beyond understanding, especially with the report of the three civil rights workers feared dead. When I arrived, we were instructed not to stand by a lighted window at night, the shade providing a silhouette for shooters; guns everywhere, displayed on the rear decks of cars, as the one circling our Freedom School over and over. When civil rights workers reported their rough treatment, FBI agents would interrogate them at COFO headquarters, treating them like criminals rather than victims. (In my cord jacket and tie I sat in on "interviews," hoping my thirty-something respectability would hold these bulldogs at bay—actually not much.) So, what happened to Mrs. Hamer was preview and microcosm of what took place in the summer of 1964.

Let me go on with her affidavit: "I began to move—and the first Negro was made to sit on my feet to keep me from kicking. I remember I tried to smooth my dress which was working up from all of the beating. One of the white officers pushed my dress up. I was screaming and going on—and the young officer with the crew-cut began to beat me about the head and told me to stop my screaming. I began to bury my head in the mattress and hugged it to keep out the sound of my screams." Is it any wonder that Freedom Summer took place, the training on campuses for nonviolence, the clergy coming in, the sense of absolute determination—little of the same urgency today, the same mobilization of conscience (I recently asked a gathering of ministers, where are you today, when issues of war and surveillance are so pressing?) now directed to staring down militarism beginning at the top, with Obama.

Mrs. Hamer, before being returned to her cell: "It was impossible to stop the screaming. I must have passed out—I remember trying to raise my head and heard one of the officers, 'Bassinger' who said that's enough. He said get up and walk. I could barely walk. My body was real hard—feeling like metal. My hands were navy blue—and I couldn't bend the fingers." Later: "Then they got us [the others taken, beaten, one woman, 'a hole in her head from her beating'] up one night to take our pictures and John Bassinger, who had taken the pictures, forced me to sign a statement which they already made me write, that I had been treated all right. That night was the following Monday night. I tried to write the statement in such a way that anybody would know that I had been forced to write the statement." She closed this portion (the remainder of the affidavit referred to the beating of Lawrence Guyot, a field secretary of SNCC, her release secured by SCLC leaders, and the fact that she "had been fired from [her] Plantation job, Dee Marlow's Plantation, Ruleville," for attempting to register to vote): "The following Tuesday, we had our trial. There was no jury. We had no lawyer. We were charged and was found guilty of Disorderly Conduct and Resisting Arrest. When we were put in the jail...I told them that nothing is right around here. The arresting officer had lied and said that I was resisting arrest. I told them that I was not leaving my cell—and that if they wanted me, they had to kill me in the cell and drag me out." And her final words here speak volumes for, Why Mississippi Freedom Summer: "I rather be killed inside my cell instead of outside my cell."

This same choice the US offers the world, except that the inside-outside distinction becomes obliterated in the face of modern warfare. Mrs. Hamer puts the lie to Obama's blackness, stripping him naked for the world to see an imposter, salivating over power, ANYTHING to serve America's masters—to which we all are becoming enslaved. Freedom Summer should start circa 2014 with cleaning up totalitarianism here at home.

JUNE 20, 2014

### **Reflections on Fascism**

Fascism is not a dirty word, it is 21st century America. Since we live it, we should own it. Given the US corporate structure, wealth concentration, record of intervention, polity-saturated militarism, disdain of world opinion and international law, disparagement of equality as a structural-economic proposition, we give ourselves little wriggle-room for the democratization of what cannot be democratized, a system of power predicated on global expansion, capitalist internal features of commodity-worship, alienation, and habituated submission to authority (economic, political, military alike), and now, with American capitalism experiencing a stage of evolving decay, accompanied by a sense and spirit of desperation to reverse the decline in its own right as well as relative especially to world historical forces, themselves becoming more capitalistic, the striking out, full-blown counterrevolution, to arrest the process of social change.

It is not a pretty picture. Simply to have NSA, CIA, FBI, free to act without restraint, a triumvirate worthy of any police state, massive surveillance, foreign assassination and intrigue, domestic suppression of radicalism, all brought to a convergence under the heading of national security (aka counterterrorism), is—or should be—enough to satisfy Webster's. It isn't though. Introspection is not an American strong point; we like to obfuscate, play the angles, anything but look squarely at ourselves, for fear of what lies behind the democratic mask, and therefore, for fear of what we might see. Uppermost, a moral void, an emptiness from top to bottom, Obama cynically accepting the manipulation of upper groups (including the military and intelligence communities, but equally if not more so the financial and corporate elites) while himself manipulating blacks, workers, the unemployed and dispossessed in general on behalf of the selfsame upper groups. What of the PEOPLE? Will we fight back, or has the narcotization process of patriotism destroyed resistance to what is happening?

The very fact that Obama is free to act in the ways he has, positioning America into confrontation with Russia and China, positioning American capitalism through government assistance, positive, bailouts and subsidies, negative, deregulation, to greater consolidation, and positioning bottom groups to a status of ultimate underclass, from weak unions to stagnant wages, does not auger well for an inspired citizenry, whom, by their inaction, confirms the, for at least now, mass acquiescence and political docility which is a hallmark of fascism. From both ends of the structural framework, an advanced capitalism oligopolistic if not in fact monopolistic in character, and a nonmilitant, spiritless, somewhat brainwashed working class, the efflorescence of fascism—nothing in the American historical tradition of preoccupation with capitalism, individualism, class-and-race differentiation, to hold it back.

Look around. The national budget testifies to an overweening military purpose and presence. The last two wars—Iraq, Afghanistan—liberated base instincts as only wars can, so that indiscriminate

killing is perhaps chief among them, followed by drone assassination, torture, rendition, and a tightening of the screws by which to nullify civil liberties, all of which can be found in present-day America. Bush 2 cannot be blamed for the failure of American liberalism, as though creating a framework from which the nation had no other choice but to continue. Elections could be about extrication rather than continuity; liberals chose the latter, practically seamlessly, thus Obama's intensifying main elements identified with Bush, from enlarging executive power and demonstrating contempt for civil liberties, to a foreign policy that was geared to permanent war, even going his predecessor a giant step further in the Pacific. Yet even in Europe and the Middle East one finds a belligerence hard to match, primarily the use of Ukraine to place NATO on Russia's doorstep—as though Obama had to wear his war credentials to stave off Republican critics.

Iraq is back, as in blowback: this replaces Ukraine for the moment, America always on the lookout for a situation which can be turned, because of US policy in the first place, into a source of provocation. Iraq, our intervention guaranteed internal civil war, here, with the gains of ISIS, a chance to return in some form, concentrated drone attacks, rather than so-called “boots on the ground,” possibly to inflame the entire region, itself destabilized for obvious reasons (protection of Israel and the continued plight of the Palestinians). As Spinney and Polk wrote in *CounterPunch*, contradiction plagues American policy, in this case, turning to Iran for help against ISIS while threatening Iran for some time with severe military and economic punishment. How Obama and Kerry can keep straight faces is one for the annals of war.

Yet contradiction is not quite right; consistency in seeking conclusive dominance come hell or high water is more like it. One need not root for ISIS to see the failure of US policy with respect to Iraq, Iran, Israel, and Syria, for they are all tied together—except for Israel, paramount in American war considerations, in each of the others the side chosen by the US, first, is determined by a regional balance of power which favors factions in Israel's favor (presumably this affects policy toward Sisi in Egypt, too), and second, the side chosen at the beginning is frequently America's adversary next time around. This is what happened in Afghanistan with the Taliban. Let's see what happens in the others. Will we need Iran to help Maliki, will we need Assad to conquer ISIS?

Even the constancy of objectives, perhaps summarized as global hegemony, but beyond even that, a self-willed inner destructiveness taking the remainder of the world with us, does however bear out the Spinney-Polk thesis of contradiction, in that America itself is a contradiction. In Freudian terms, we find Eros vs. Thanatos, the tug-of-war between the life and death impulses, in the context of international rivalries and keeping class-stratification intact at home, prospering capitalism while encouraging war-producing tensions. But more simply, America's internal contradiction lies in its slick professions of democracy as a life-giving historical force, yet because of this very slickness, a more fundamental layer underneath of authoritarianism: submission to a giant corporate business AND social order, hierarchy fashioning and maintaining both, submission as well to all things which pertain to militarism, war, the reification of force as the blunt instrument of national policy, and finally submission to a self-justificatory ideology which grants America a Uniqueness in world affairs to prosper, conquer, be divinely guided for all eternity.

Today, Iraq lies in US cross-hairs, tomorrow, another target, but the fact of targets always. On June 13, we learn, from Tim Arengo's NYT article, “Choosing Rebels Over Army, Iraqis Head Home,” that ISIS's progress, overrunning city after city thus far, is at least partly the result of the

Maliki government's own repression of the Sunni population (for The Times to admit this, is earth-shattering). My NYT Comment on the article, same date, follows:

## I

Kudos to Arango. NYT has so taken the US-Maliki line that it is surprising to note such Iraqi tactics as the bombing of Falluja, attacks on the civilian population, official corruption, AND popular support for ISIS over the Iraqi government in the affected areas. One thinks of Pogo: We have met the enemy, and it is us—the us being both the US-installed unpopular government and the US itself.

It is unconscionable (read, a moral evil) to have invaded Iraq and Afghanistan in the first place. The world has our number, utter militaristic power moves to maintain a global hegemony no longer possible to enforce, given the emergent multipolar structure of the world system. Yet how many in America realize that events in Iraq and Afghanistan both are a searing refutation of US foreign policy—a policy still persisted in?

Russia and China await America's wrath. We have sunk to the point—this is entirely bipartisan, not a bunch of whackos on the Right—of having internalized a death wish—a go-for-broke attitude if we cannot remain top dog—that could set the stage for nuclear annihilation, not just for enemies but all of humanity.

Watching Obama muttering on tv about options brings home the absolutely unqualified person who is the most powerful on earth, shallow, belligerent, chained to the military and intelligence communities and national-security advisers drawn from central casting for Strangelove, Episode Two.

Then on June 18 we find ISIS's further advances, to which Obama responds with his all-options-on-the-table posture, translated as a typical coyness in the use of force, the normalization of political murder through the use of drone attacks, here described by Mark Landler and Eric Schmitt's NYT article, "Obama Said to Consider Airstrikes on Sunni Militants," in a way that shares Obama's own complacency about the use of force. Also June 18, The Times's editorial, "A Balancing Act on Iraq," credits him with a moderation and wisdom hardly deserved. My NYT Comments on both, same date, follow:

## II

The account matches the actual war-planning rationale, so moderate, rational, antiseptic—the psychopathology of everyday mass murder. Drones, options, expanding or contracting the response, etc., how pleasant and neutral-sounding. Obama thirsts for war; liberal humanitarianism is the cosmetic for hegemonic glory.

The Iraq war was a miscarriage of international justice, and moral abomination. Yet America continues. The scene is ugly, chilling—par for the course.

## III

The Times continues to sanction Obama's war plans, equating them and him with rationality, moderation, sweet reasonableness. Even drones emerge as surgical instruments

that destroy the bad guys. Why not face the horrific consequences of Obama's passion for intervention? How even recommend the vacuous distinction between support for the Iraqi army without specific endorsement of al-Maliki? They go together, neither of them other than a US creation and plaything.

Imperialism is ugly. Collateral damage is ugly. Regime change is ugly. Lies about WMD legitimating the Iraq War are ugly. Yet The Times persists in going forward, lacking the moral courage to condemn the whole rotten mess.

ISIS did not arise through spontaneous combustion. Nor probably did bin Laden. What would the world have been like had America not encircled the globe (including Saudi Arabia) with military bases? And now, after threatening the destruction of Iran (and six decades earlier, CIA overthrow of a democratic government there which led to the Shah) we seek their assistance—absurd contradiction.

Washington is gunning for war, lest the recognition sets in of US decay and decline because of worldly ambitions of military superiority starving out needed improvements at home. By not exposing Obama's militarism, the paper abets it—as more civilians die.

JUNE 24, 2014

### **Bright Spot in the American Miasma**

Miasma: an atmosphere that tends to corrupt, alternatively, a vaporous exhalation believed to cause disease—take your pick, each signifies America currently, the former, a policy context geared to global hegemony abroad simultaneous with massive surveillance and social control at home, the latter, 21st century liberal rhetoric, especially that of Obama combining the National Security State with Advanced Capitalism to obscure corporatism for purposes of achieving the former. Indeed, “miasma” is a pretty generous designation in light of compulsive intervention and targeted assassination abroad, enjoying popular support (or at least no sign of a deserved groundswell of protest) and matched domestically by structural-economic trends toward the further shaping of an underclass: a black president's estimable contribution to the welfare of blacks, and working people in general.

I begin thusly because in such an atmosphere, anything that bucks the tide of officially-sanctioned Truth is a bright spot, cause for celebration, however seemingly minor the movement of thought forward. In a tightly-closed society, every declaration, every gesture, of freedom, is a symbolic victory which has the capacity for generating a groundswell of protest. On Friday last (June 20), meeting in Detroit in general convention, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) narrowly voted, 310 to 303, to divest from three American companies directly supplying equipment to Israel in its continued assault on the Palestinian people. The amount seems insignificant, \$21M, hence primarily of symbolic value, but, along with Mennonites and Quakers, divestment was approved, here a major Protestant denomination not easily ridiculed out of existence (although Israelis and American Jewish organization spokespersons tried). The object was to stop settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the targets selected highly specific—Caterpillar (bulldozers to level Palestinian homes and crush resistance), Hewlett-Packard and Motorola (surveillance equipment and technology).

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Why is this important? Lately, churches have been on my mind, or more exactly, ministers. This is the 50th anniversary of Mississippi Freedom Summer (see my recent CounterPunch article which seeks to connect those events with the present, the Obama administration, his and its record of intervention and social poverty), which began with the disappearance and MURDER of three civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, significantly, a biracial coalition in microcosm, two Jews, one black. The historical connection between then and now is twofold at the outset, summarized in Obama's denigration of the civil-rights cause and, with Schwerner-Chaney-Goodman, the equally clear denigration of the humanistic-ethical-radical teachings and protest of American Judaism, which, perhaps up to, say, 1950, had been in the vanguard of American social-democratic action, by itself, and often in coalition with black organizations and groups. This progressive dimension of incipient as well as actual radicalism found in both groups has been lost, gradually for blacks after 1970 and, more abruptly in the days of the Second Red Scare (the First, the Palmer Raids of World War One vintage) for Jews in America with the advent of McCarthyism and antiradicalism run amuck.

Here Israel must be factored into the analysis to explain Jewish social-political-ideological conservatism and the collapse of Jewish-Black mutual bonds of social struggle on behalf of freedom and justice. In the case of both bridges to the present, what has been lost in a journey toward conformity and submission is the recognition of, and motivation to act on and be inspired by, a moral cause. Business as usual, as funneled through the two major parties in their race to the bottom in inflicting harm on humanity. For blacks, this did not have to be, Dr. King's inspired mission and vision, which inseparably connected both opposition to the Vietnam War and mounting the Poor People's Campaign, together, as he intended, a fundamental alternative direction for American society. Mississippi Freedom Summer was like a launch pad for the radicalization of civil-rights protest.

Before 1950, pride of Jewish radicalism was what really defined the Jewish community, a sense of social enlightenment, as in giving support to FDR and the New Deal, which cut across class lines and welcomed biracial progress and equitable policies of government. There were obvious exceptions, but, as I recall, most if not all Jews felt a personal loss with the execution of the Rosenbergs, knowing instinctively that whatever our politics (myself included, as a 17-year-old awakening radical), they fought the right fight: anti-Fascism. World War Two was a cataclysmic event, of course, for Jews, but even for American Jews, and this, more than membership of some in the Communist Party, defined a world outlook, with a carry over to domestic politics, like FEPC and sympathy for the Soviet Union in gratitude for the millions killed in Russia to defeat Hitler. The Progressive Party of 1948, with Henry Wallace, as presidential candidate, would be unrecognizable today—and certainly from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama, bookends in lighting the fires of Cold War, on which America appears to thrive.

Anti-Fascist was my identity of choice in high school and college (a designation long-and-deliberately thrown on the ash-heap of history by what we generally call, the forces of order), with its corollary, racial justice and the end to segregation and lynching. That was inscribed in the Jewish DNA, and, for me, took the form of Aaron Copland's Third Symphony, written in the midst of the Second World War, the great anti-fascist symphony, with the Fanfare for the Common Man orchestrated as a deafening affirmation of humankind, as well as the work of Ben Shahn, as in his

deeply moving depiction of Sacco and Vanzetti and their powerful words before execution. In short, the Jewish community through the aftermath of the War provided an umbrella under which labor rights, civil rights, and a flourishing of the arts were pursued. And this context of creativity and protest also provided the idealism first associated with American views of Zionism: labor Zionism, Habonim among high-school students, in which there was no thought of persecuting others, no ethnic cleansing (which after all had been the fate of European Jewry).

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The sea-change in the American radical landscape to that of obedient servants of power (what the British antiwar poets might have described as cannon fodder) can be seen in the stir created by the Presbyterian modest proposal of divestment. Modest, yet again, symbolic, not least because of the hate-mongering engaged in by Jewish groups and Israeli officials in retaliation. This was not an anti-Semitic proposal, as churned out by the AIPAC propaganda machinery against all critics of Israel, Jews especially, like myself. I am indebted to Laurie Goodstein's New York Times article, "Presbyterians Vote to Divest Holdings to Pressure Israel," (June 21), for a balanced account of the controversy, including the derogatory references directed to this action. (I have learned to expect NYT bias in all things related to Israel, US foreign policy, anything pertaining to Russia and China, etc., thus making this article the more astonishing. For a recent critique of NYT, particularly on surveillance policy, see Glenn Greenwald's No Place to Hide.) She points out the good will surrounding the divestment: "The measure that was passed not only called for divestment but also reaffirmed Israel's right to exist, endorsed a two-state solution, encouraged interfaith dialogue and travel to the Holy Land, and instructed the church to undertake 'positive investment' in endeavors that advance peace and improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians." The motion even denied endorsement of B.D.S. (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions), yet not good enough for the watchdogs of Israel's security in the US and Israel. This despite the statement of Heath Rada, the church's moderator and leader of the proceedings: "In no way is this a reflection of our lack of love for our Jewish sisters and brothers."

Perhaps the closer one comes to placating Israel, the swifter and harsher is its response. Goodstein writes, "Large American Jewish organizations lobbied the Presbyterians furiously to defeat the divestment vote," and "more than 1,700 rabbis from all 50 states signed an open letter" to the assembly urging its defeat, while Rabbi Rick Jacobs of the Reform movement (American Judaism's largest branch) offered to set up a meeting with Netanyahu and "the church's two top leaders so they could convey their church's concerns about the occupation—on the condition that the divestment measure was defeated." She reported that this only stoked the delegates' anger, "given what they perceive as Mr. Netanyahu's approval of more settlements in disputed areas and lack of enthusiasm for peace negotiations." Finally, she notes: "Major Jewish organizations were quick to issue statements expressing distress and outrage. Rabbi Steve Gutow, president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, called the divestment action 'outrageous' and said it would have a 'devastating effect' on relations between the national church and mainstream Jewish groups."

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My perspective: It's time to throw the ball in the other court. I'll stand with the Rosenbergs as the exemplars of world Jewry at a particular moment in history, and it is the Neo-Cons, AIPAC, those who defend Israel no matter what crimes it commits, who are the real anti-Semites, precisely



because they have falsified the spirit and teaching of Torah and the rich philosophical heritage of Jews who have been in the foreground of humanity's struggle for all peoples. Enough pampering. Get on track, or earn the opprobrium (if not already) of humankind, including Jewish people who have not been blinded by totemic loyalties. My New York Times Comment on the Goodstein article, same date, follows:

Presbyterian Church U.S.A. does not go far enough, softening its vote by too many concessions. Two facts stand out in my mind: 1) the Jewish community in America has drastically changed, from a once-proud radical force through the end of WWII, to an increasingly conservative social force aligned with USG on war, intervention, antiradicalism, super-patriotism—truly a denial of its once-love for human rights. Neocons of course illustrate the trend, from Vietnam to Latin American death squads (even siding with Argentina when the “disappeared” were mostly Jewish, because it might hurt an Israeli-Argentine wheat deal). Reprehensible the Jewish position in support of dictators, e.g., the Shah of Iran.

2) Israel itself similarly has lost its kibbutz-spirit by the end of WWII, Zionism becoming an arrogant, oppressive force committed to ethnic cleansing and an ideology of superiority which succinctly shows the psychopathology of moving from oppressed to oppressor, persecuted to PERSECUTORS. Israel's militarism defines its national character—the real split is now between Israeli policy and mental-set on one hand, and teachings of Torah on the other.

As a Jew I say, knowing the denunciation to follow, Israel is the enemy of Judaism. It didn't have to be this way. Arrogance, cruelty defined the Zionist relationship to the Palestinians very early; a self-styled warrior state on hire to reactionary global regimes defines its relationship to the world. No compassion for others.

JULY 2, 2014

### **US Intimidated by Its Own Mercenaries**

Even the mightiest have their come-uppance when their internal logic spews out destructiveness returning on the self—“blowback” in a way perhaps not seen before. I refer to James Risen's extraordinary article in the New York Times, “Before Shooting in Iraq, a Warning on Blackwater,” (June 30), in which the customary meaning of “blowback” refers to policies, e.g., the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, the “pivot” of military power to the Pacific intent on the encirclement, containment, isolation of China, produce unintended, or if intended, still unwelcome, consequences for the initiator of the policy or action.

Thus: Iraq, out-of-control (from the US standpoint, a raging civil war negating massive intervention and alerting the world to America's hegemonic purposes); Afghanistan, original support of the Taliban against the Soviet Union, resulting in their material strengthening now turned against the US, endangering its power-position in the region; use of Ukraine as a basis for bringing NATO forces to the Russian border, now an overreach which may disrupt the EU and weaken US dominance over it; and blatant confrontation with China, both military and trade, with potential for war leading to nuclear annihilation. The status and role of world policeman is losing its blackjack,

its reputation as global bully being challenged through the rise of multiple power-centers and industrial-commercial-financial patterns no longer defined, supervised, indeed controlled, by American global interests and military implementation.

That is blowback in its familiar guise. Less so, the self-chosen instruments of repression spilling out of behemoth's mouth because America's dependence on repression to secure its aims makes it dependent as well on the executors of repression, in this case, given the extreme stress on privatization (the core of the monster's functional existence), Blackwater at your service, a private army on hire to USG for pursuit of the dirty work, deemed necessary, yet, delegated to official forces, the cause of embarrassment and shame. Browbeating indigenous populations, with an overwhelming swagger and display in the grand tradition of conquerors, in addition to protecting representatives of the conquerors, is a mission worthy, as here, of billion dollar contracts to the private militias (euphemism: "security guards") as insurance the military victory and occupation will hold.

Here Blackwater is, and is treated as, inseparable from the intervention (read: conquest) itself, at times assisting in the fighting on an informal basis—it has not yet been invited to join NATO(!)—but more to the point, the intimidating presence in the post-military phase, as though instilling the message: You Iraqis think the military is bad, well don't mess around, for far worse awaits you, we former Navy SEALs know nothing can touch us. Our motto might as well be, A Law Unto Ourselves, even USG—beyond the status-of-forces agreement it forced your government to sign—afraid of us. Blowback: the cancer in the bowels of behemoth rapidly spreading to the extremities, spinal column, brain. Soon we shall all be made over in the image of Blackwater, or rather, as Blackwater would like to see, as its actions show, America become, a nation subservient to its thugs, extolling martial glory for its own sake and for the sake of global dominance. Authoritarianism once off the ground knows no limits and demands the complete adherence of its subjects. America has lived with CIA for decades; Blackwater is icing on the cake.

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Before turning to the evidence contained in James Risen's article, it is important to see how events from the past are converging on the present. His credentials as a whistleblower are borne out by his previous record (exposure of CIA dirty tricks, in his book *State of War*, with respect to Iran's nuclear program) and current circumstances (he faces a possible jail sentence for refusing to disclose, from that account, the identity of an anonymous source). In the Bush doghouse for exposing the use of warrantless wire taps in 2005, and now, Obama contemplating more serious action, jail time for not complying with a DOJ subpoena, possibly leading to an Espionage Act prosecution, for which Obama excels over all of his predecessors combined (liberals, of course, furiously denying the sordid record), Risen not only stares down his persecutors, Obama, Holder, DOJ, but here presents an exposure in some ways more damning of US baseness from the top down, nurturing a murderous nest in the structure of government.

As for the administration hounding, Jonathan Mahler's New York Times article, "Reporter's Case Poses Dilemma for Justice Dept.," (June 27), implies that Risen's refusal to be intimidated is causing Obama and Holder second thoughts about pushing for his imprisonment. According to John Rizzo, CIA's acting general counsel, Bush people wanted *State of War* kept off the market—too late, however. Risen then was subpoenaed to testify against the suspected leaker—and refused.

“More than six years of legal wrangling,” in what Mahler terms “the most serious confrontation between the government and the press in recent history,” is coming to a head. Risen “is now out of challenges. Early this month, the Supreme Court declined to review his case, a decision that allows prosecutors to compel his testimony.”

But *The Times*, in defending its own man, cannot strongly protest, lest it antagonize the White House. Yes, Obama appears to be in a bind: “Though the court’s decision looked like a major victory for the government, it has forced the Obama administration to confront a hard choice. Should it demand Mr. Risen’s testimony and be responsible for a reporter’s being sent to jail? Or reverse course and stand down, losing credibility with an intelligence community that has pushed for the aggressive prosecution of leaks?” If Obama and USG were truly democratic (small “d”), there should not be a choice but only one course of action, moreover reigning in the “intelligence community” serving under their control.

The reporter, I believe reflecting the paper’s view, however, credits the Obama administration with actually weighing alternatives and being capable of making moral choices: “The dilemma comes at a critical moment for an administration that has struggled to find a balance between aggressively enforcing laws against leaking and demonstrating concern for civil liberties and government transparency.” What balance? What concern? Everything points the other way, on both civil liberties (e.g., due process and habeas corpus rights for detainees) and government transparency (simply, a thick protective shield in place, symbolized by the high art of redaction—and, as with Blackwater’s killing sprees, the refusal or half-heartedness about prosecution). Its reporter’s back against the wall, NYT ignores the Espionage Act prosecutions of whistleblowers.

Mahler succinctly describes the reporting: “The failed C.I.A. action at the heart of Mr. Risen’s reporting was intended to sabotage Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Intelligence officials assigned a former Russian scientist who had defected to the United States to deliver a set of faulty blueprints for a nuclear device to an Iranian scientist. But the Russian scientist became nervous and informed the Iranians that the plans were flawed.” One readily appreciates the dangers to the National Security State, especially revelations of the stupidity and dangerousness of its crown jewel, CIA, posed by investigative journalism. *The Times*, to its everlasting shame, bowed to Coldoleezza Rice’s request to withhold publication of the article. As a *Times* spokesperson later declared, “We weighed the government’s concerns and the usual editorial considerations and decided not to run the story.” Hence, James Risen—enemy of National Security; he “broke the story” later in *State of War*. Yet Bush is not the only culprit in this story; Obama ordered two additional subpoenas to force Risen to testify, his DOJ going after him hammer-and-tongs: “After a trial court largely quashed his third subpoena [the first under Bush] in late 2010, the Justice Department successfully challenged the ruling in a federal appeals court, arguing that the First Amendment does not afford any special protections to journalists.” Enough said about the dedication to civil liberties and freedom of the press: “The administration then urged the Supreme Court not to review Mr. Risen’s case.”

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I have already discussed the mass killings in Nisour Square, Baghdad, in a previous article. Now we learn that this was part of a pattern in Blackwater’s behavior—again, Risen’s reporting. Even for one who is a seasoned critic, it is painful for me to write about. Organized thuggery knows no limits

particularly when working for the highest authority, immunity from punishment worn as a badge of honor, as meanwhile government officials hide their eyes. Risen writes, “Just weeks before Blackwater guards fatally shot 17 civilians in Baghdad’s Nisour Square in 2007, the State Department began investigating the security contractor’s operations in Iraq. But the inquiry was abandoned after Blackwater’s top manager there issued a threat: ‘that he could kill’ the government’s chief investigator and ‘no one could or would do anything about it as we were in Iraq,’ according to department reports.” A private contractor threatens the life of a State Department investigator! No reprisal, punishment, cancellation of the contract, not even disclosure of the threat—yet Blackwater still in place years later, as part of the silence on atrocities in the Obama-Hillary era.

Those 17 killed are on America’s hands, bloody hands. There was a clear warning about what to expect: “After returning to Washington, the chief investigator wrote a scathing report to State Department officials documenting misconduct by Blackwater employees and warning that lax oversight of the company, which had a contract worth more than \$1 billion to protect American diplomats, had created ‘an environment full of liability and negligence.’” Even more outrageous, Risen notes, the investigators become the criminals gumming up the security works: “American Embassy officials in Baghdad sided with Blackwater rather than the State Department investigators as a dispute over the probe escalated in August 2007, the previously undisclosed documents show. The officials told the investigators that they had disrupted the embassy’s relationship with the security contractor and ordered them to leave the country, according to the reports.”

Jean Richter, lead investigator, wrote, in a memo to the State Department only weeks prior to Nisour Square: “The management structures in place to manage and monitor our contracts in Iraq have become subservient to the contractors themselves. Blackwater contractors saw themselves as above the law.... ‘hands off’ [management meant that] the contractors, instead of Department officials, are in command and in control.” Now, nearly seven years later, four Blackwater guards are on trial, facing, if ever convicted, watered down charges, this being “the government’s second attempt to prosecute the case in an American court [I wonder how serious the effort under Holder and Obama] after previous charges against five guards were dismissed in 2009.” Much of the time this is on Obama’s watch, yet, “despite a series of investigations in the wake of Nisour Square, the back story of what happened with Blackwater and the embassy in Baghdad before the fateful shooting has never been fully told.”

So much for transparency, civil liberties, and prosecuting the crimes of a predecessor (the cardinal rule of presidents, at least this one, cover-up WAR CRIMES past and present, a solemn command of the National Security State). Silence and deniability, in all matters large and small, characterize the responses of USG and private principals: “The State Department declined to comment on the aborted investigation. A spokesman for Erik Prince, the founder and former chief executive of Blackwater, who sold the company in 2010, said Mr. Prince had never been told about the matter.” The \$1B contract itself testifies to the fusion of patriotism, secrecy, repression, and yes, corporate profit: “After Mr. Prince sold the company, the new owners named it Academi. In early June, it merged with Triple Canopy, one of its rivals for government and commercial contracts to provide private security. The new firm is called Constellis Holdings.” Like war, private security stands to make a killing (pardon the pun), no doubt in flight from the original name for damage-control and public-relations purposes.

Previous to Nisour Square (Sept. 16, 2007) Blackwater guards “acquired a reputation...for swagger and recklessness,” but complaints “about practices ranging from running cars off the road to shooting wildly in the streets and even killing civilians typically did not result in serious action by the United States or the Iraqi government.” After firing in the Square, there was closer scrutiny, the Blackwater claim that they were fired on even US military officials denied, and “[f]ederal prosecutors later said Blackwater personnel had shot indiscriminately with automatic weapons, heavy machine guns and grenade launchers.” To no avail, given the symbiotic relationship between the company and the government. In fact, Blackwater had itself been run by Prince as a nation in microcosm, its people shortly before Nisour Square gathered by him at company headquarters in Moyock, North Carolina and made to “swear an oath of allegiance” like the one required of enlistees in the US military. They were handed copies of the oath, which, after reciting the words, were told to sign.

The State Department investigation into Blackwater in Iraq, which began Aug. 1, 2007 and was slated for one month, led early to the “volatile” situation (including the death threat), our knowledge coming from “internal State Department documents” furnished “to plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Blackwater that was unrelated to the Nisour Square shootings,” seemingly by accident then and fleshed out by Risen. In that month—or that part of it before being forced to leave—the investigators discovered “a long list of contract violations by Blackwater,” staffing changes of security details “without State Department approval,” reducing the number of guards on details, “storing automatic weapons and ammunition in their private rooms, where they were drinking heavily and partying with frequent female visitors,” and, for many, failing “to regularly qualify on their weapons” or “carrying weapons on which they had never been certified” nor “authorized to use.” Extravagance for mayhem abroad, less than peanuts for critical needs at home, education, health care, employment, beyond the means or reach of Imperial grandeur as the national obsession.

In addition to “overbilling the State Department by manipulating its personnel records, using guards assigned to the State Department contract for other work and falsifying other staffing data on the contract,” (no wonder the investigators’ poor reception by Blackwater’s resident head in Iraq), one of its affiliates forced “third country nationals” who did the dirty work at low wages “to live in squalid conditions, sometimes three to a cramped room with no bed,” according to the investigators’ report. Their conclusion: “Blackwater was getting away with such conduct because embassy personnel had gotten too close to the contractor.”

Ah, the denouement; we have a name to go with the face of the project manager who threatened Richter’s life, Daniel Carroll, who said he could kill him without anything happening to himself “as we were in Iraq” (this was witnessed by Donald Thomas, the other investigator), and Richter, in his memo to the Department stated: “I took Mr. Carroll’s threat seriously. We were in a combat zone where things can happen unexpectedly, especially when issues involve potentially negative impacts on a lucrative security contract.” Nicely put, and corroborated by Thomas, who wrote in a separate memo that “others in Baghdad had told the two investigators to be ‘very careful,’ considering that their review could jeopardize job security for Blackwater personnel.” The wonder perhaps is that Richter and Thomas were not prosecuted under the Espionage Act for spoiling the show. It didn’t matter. No one at State listened.

The two men were ordered to leave (Aug 23), and “cut short their inquiry and returned to Washington the next day.” Finally, on Oct. 5, after the Nisour Square scandal, State Department

officials responded to Richter's "August warning," and took statements from him and Thomas about "their accusations of a threat by Mr. Carroll, but took no further action." A special panel convened by Rice on Nisour Square "never interviewed Mr. Richter or Mr. Thomas." The official who led the panel "told reporters on Oct. 23, 2007, that the panel had not found any communications from the embassy in Baghdad before the Nisour Square shooting that raised concerns about contractor conduct." Voila, vanished in thin air. This State Department officer deserves the last word: "We interviewed a large number of individuals. We did not find any, I think, significant pattern of incidents that had not—that the embassy had suppressed in any way." And my last word: fascism. Beyond all structural-cultural-societal considerations about wealth-concentration, industrial-financial consolidation, foreign expansion through preponderant power and the spirit of militarism, the rampaging privatization with government consent witnessed here, which has wreaked havoc on another people, only to be covered over by the state, aka, the National Security State, disregarding its Constitutional protections to the individual, as in sponsoring massive surveillance, is enough for me to satisfy the working definition of that single word.

JULY 3, 2014

### **The Efflorescence of American Fascism**

Every day under Obama the US moves closer to an irreversible trajectory of military provocation which can readily culminate in nuclear war. And official Washington, all three branches of government, seems not to care. Indeed, it is only when POTUS is most saber-rattling, most aggressive in his hostility toward Russia and China, most comfortable in defending secrecy in government, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with NSA in providing massive surveillance of the American people, and with CIA in conducting covert operations toward regime change and armed-drone assassinations, that his ratings go up and his critics hold back. It is as though a political-cultural-ideological predisposition to fascistic assumptions of force and superiority (together, Exceptionalism) holds sway even before the execution of policy. Obama perfectly embodies the requirements of leadership in this historical context and structural framework. He is at once the figurehead for such a systemic configuration that possesses the aura of liberalism (the skillful employment of race to keep liberals in line while muting Rightist attacks that otherwise, had he in fact been radical, would be harsher) yet conjoins militarism to market fundamentalism as an expansionist dynamic to maintain world supremacy.

A figurehead? Only in the sense that he fronts a stage of advanced capitalism which itself, to reach that point, presupposes a tightly organized ruling stratum. I use "stratum" rather than "class" so as to signify the accommodation by upper groups, economic, social, political, of diverse others useful to purposes of social control at home, hegemony abroad—i.e., leaders of the military and intelligence communities as both stabilizing/conservative influences and resources for enforcing group dominance. No longer can one speak of a mere economic elite pulling strings from Olympian heights. The ruling stratum of course is a class anyway; nonetheless it is in need of auxiliaries to firm up support for its protection, increasingly in the form of military power and the technological means of repression. Therefore, welcome to the club, on condition of loyalty to the top—even though personal property and wealth are yet inadequate.

Obama by his actions gives the right assurances, and, following the example set by Bill Clinton, he will undoubtedly “cash in” at the right time, although the theme of self-enrichment is far less important than his present aptitude for service which, far from being hypocritical or subservient, he carries out because he believes so completely in the virtue of extreme wealth and the wealthy, toughened up to meet the challenges of domination. In sum, he is a willing figurehead—the most dangerous kind. Militarism especially attracts him, like a fly to flypaper.

One does not need to place him on the proverbial Freudian couch to see his hatred of Putin, in so many ways different from himself, starting with calmness in the holding of power, personal self-assurance, the non-necessity for demonstrating boldness to the world. Obama’s capacity for hatred, however, extends well beyond Putin, for we see it in the persons of whistleblowers, as though—which may well be true, depending on circumstances—they question his integrity, honesty, intelligence (for the latter, read facileness, cuteness, slipperiness) and raise doubts about his judgment. As in his use of the teleprompter, he lives behind protective psychological walls, seeking to convey the appearance of authority when deep-down there is, as he is fully aware, uncertainty, lack of confidence, knowledge of his fraudulence, most pointedly and perhaps poignantly, his moral emptiness.

Criticism becomes totalized and to be avoided or put down at all costs—totalized in that his personality core is so fragile that he views disparagement of any kind, however slight, as the denial of his very being. And what he ascribes to his own needs he projects on that of the nation, the National Security State an extension of the protective walls around the self. No wonder a morbid fear of transparency, running the gamut from paramilitary operations for subversion and regime change, to withheld reports on collateral damage, to redacted documents on legal advice and authorization for killing Americans, to opaqueness as a way of governance! The liberal mask Obama presents in justification for the Democratic party’s proclivity toward war, intervention, and sacrifice of the class interests of working people and minorities at home, is just that, a mask that covers inner moral emptiness as well as fools the constituency to be addressed and the public at large.

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Too harsh? We hear that surges, assassination, spying, must be laid at Bush’s door, hence exonerating Obama (part of the mythology of liberalism and the presumption a black president somehow must stand for social justice). The fact of CONTINUITY demolishes the argument. Obama reversed nothing, actually intensifying the central elements of his predecessor’s policies, whether drones, intervention, support of dictators, or, most important, enlargement of the Cold War structural-cultural framework to include, via deliberate containment policies, the simultaneous confrontation of Russia and China offering a potential for conflagration and more. Bush had his share of nutcakes for aggression (he need only look at himself in the mirror), but an element of realpolitik tempered the most flagrant power-moves. Not Obama, for the elasticity of liberalism allowed for grandiosity on the world stage—doing good by killing the enemies of Virtue. For Team Obama, every war is a “just war,” every expansion of American business testifies to the society’s greatness as the incubator of democracy—our products, corporeal expressions of political idealism, that which is devoted to setting all of humankind free.

Probably few propagators of US ideology, from the president down, believe what they are saying and doing. Liberals are as complicit in the Mass Deceit as conservatives. Market penetration, sale of military hardware overseas to “friends and allies,” counterrevolution to thwart popular movements on the Left to head off supposed communist enslavement and sheer chaos, all have a life of their own integral to the profit- and-security needs of capitalism. But they have far greater utility both for profit and security when dolled up in salvational dress. Obama keeps his informational apparatus working overtime, so that information as such is not disclosed. From this brief background, I shall take up Obama’s obsession with besting Putin (luckily for him, not a matter of two out of three falls), and then, in a subsequent article, his cover-up of a war crime (not his own, e.g., drone assassination, but that on Bush’s watch), which, nonetheless, he was able to keep largely under wraps for more than six years. In this case, liberals’ blame is heaped on Bush with no admission of Obama’s silence tantamount to complicity.

With respect to Russia, Putin, and Ukraine, Obama is on the war-path, embarrassingly so, because his call for greater sanctions exceeds that not only of EU members but also the most influential segments of American business, the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. This last is unheard of, Democrat or Republican for more than a half-century, suggesting both that for Obama ideology trumps capitalism and—for that reason—he is perhaps becoming a loose cannon (no pun intended), biting the hand of the very power structure on which he and the party system feeds. It is one thing to be unilateral when it comes to global hegemony, quite another when embodied in sanctions, for as one business spokesperson observed, Linda Dempsey, NAM’s vice president for international economic affairs (discounting the sudden love shown American workers): “Unilateral sanctions by the United States end up with other countries and their industries filling the void. The harm and the real impact of those unilateral sanctions is on U.S. industries and U.S. workers. It’s not that we’re out of the market for a year or two. We could get out of the market for decades.” Fighting among thieves warms the cockles of any radical’s heart—here, not Tea Partiers, Republicans, conservative Democrats, but the System Obama seeks to preserve and expand may prove his ultimate undoing.

The quote is from Peter Baker’s New York Times article, “Doubting Putin, Obama Prepares to Add Pressure,” (June 24), where one finds—not perhaps Baker’s intent—the extremism and zealotry that informs Obama’s position, obdurate in tightening sanctions (read also, embarrassing or humbling Putin) no matter what others think. Russia may well be the agency for a fragmentation of the EU or its growing independence from the US, either way a colossal loss of the fruits of the Cold War, including political-economic dominance of Europe itself and advantageous geopolitical placement (NATO as helpmate) in relation to Russia, all because of the Obama administration’s insistence on compliance with its wishes for exclusive superpower status: the globalization of American capitalism conjoined with unchallenged US military supremacy. There is such a thing as grabbing for too much, when the rest of the world is fast catching up. Baker aptly summarizes the administration’s position. It “has drawn up plans to escalate sanctions against Russia by targeting its financial, energy and defense industries, but faces resistance from European allies hoping to avoid a broader economic clash with Moscow that would hurt their own businesses.”

In our haste to see capitalism as an international system, we often forget one of its salient features, that of inter-capitalist rivalries that, historically, have been productive of wars, and, among capitalism’s chief worries, the seeds sown for revolution. None of this, of course, matters to



Washington, as it in fact did to Woodrow Wilson, in its pell-mell rush to remain on top, whatever it takes, contemptuous of the UN, international law, distortions of the domestic economy due to extravagant defense spending, and now, massive surveillance and forfeiture to any meaningful claim to having a democratic government. Obama sweetly (when primed) and dutifully presides over the eclipse of democracy, beginning with the attack on civil liberties and winding through the interstices of power, to result in lopsided wealth distribution and pursuit of a military-implemented global foreign policy with impunity, the name of the game being the encirclement of adversaries (China and Russia).

Putin's proposal for a longer cease-fire in Ukraine has to be denied, else the whole idea of confrontation (including Obama's various ultimatums) collapses. Not everyone is watching the World Cup; in America, one finds in influential circles a fear of overreach ("business leaders objecting to unilateral actions that would hurt their companies are kicking off an advertising campaign to oppose Mr. Obama's plans") which is matched by EU leaders "reluctant to go along if it looks like Mr. Putin may be backing down." Here the distortion, not wholly unexpected given Baker's enjoyment, over most other Times reporters, of access to the inner corridors of power—not necessarily a deliberate misleading so much as congruent viewpoints which are then equated with journalistic objectivity. He speaks of Putin's marshalling forces on the Ukrainian border when, in fact, they have been removed, and, possibly unbeknownst to Baker, because occurring simultaneous to his own article, Putin's clear announcement of the request for an extended cease-fire and other acts to encourage a peaceful resolution of the crisis, especially calling on the Russian Parliament "to rescind formal authorization to intervene militarily in Ukraine."

From that perspective, Obama's threats have no point other than to humiliate Putin, increase tensions with Russia, and claim—as US officials were doing—that Putin was motivated solely by expedience in order "to undercut European support for additional sanctions." Kerry, leading the way for an escalation of sanctions, in discussions first with PM Cameron and then with European diplomats in Brussels, has thrown down the gauntlet, the further claim being that Russia must categorically desist from what has not been proven in the first place, its full-throated support for dissidents in eastern Ukraine. Sanctions appear to follow—the administration having "developed three options for further actions...banning any further interactions with some of Russia's largest banks; cutting technology transfers to Russian energy and defense firms; and shutting down business with Russian defense companies"—no matter Putin's course, damned if he does, damned if he doesn't. The real fear in Washington is that Putin is telling the truth and is seeking a peaceful solution. For in that way, it becomes more difficult both to maintain tensions and scare the EU into America's arms.

Peace is ridiculed as an expedient to those maintaining a confrontational stance in international politics, i.e., the US, and as events play out, even, now moving closer to the present than in Baker's piece, with Poroshenko of Ukraine signing a trade agreement with the EU (June 27), Putin's continued pursuit of an overall settlement fails to make a dent in the Obama administration's belligerent attitude (read, state of readiness). Of the proposed sanctions, Baker readily admits: "Any of these actions would go far beyond the narrow penalties meted out to date against individual Russian officials, businessmen and their companies." Yet he still sees the response as measured—it could be far worse, "Iran-style sanctions," although ineffective given Russia's "broader economy."

Perceptively he sees the American dilemma: punish Russia, but also “avoid disrupting global markets.”

Obama strikes one as willing to take the risk, vindictiveness trumping all before it—implying that, as an ideologue, he is not quite the puppet we (radical critics) often take him for. One surmises the caution of the business community, where, after all, business is business—on the international level, no matter the lies fed to, and efforts at social control of, the home front. Obama is superb for the latter purposes, but is becoming increasingly problematic (save of course the colossal subsidization of the defense sector) in the realm of international economics. Corporatism, as an expansive force bursting national boundaries, requires both stability and security, and continued intervention endemic to US policymakers, as now the friction developing in US-EU relations precisely over American containment of Russia (with China a next step), is proving deleterious to both. The EU is beginning to emerge in its own right, a fact Washington is doing its best to ignore, especially in its reliance on NATO to do some of its dirty work for it as well as legitimate, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, what is primarily an American operation.

Overreach intuitively seems unlikely in capitalism, yet the realization is slowly sinking in that, particularly egged on by the Congressional Right, Obama ultimately may be bad for business. Deregulation is one thing, fine and dandy, but on the larger canvas of world trade unilateralism breeds either exclusionary measures or political conflict taking, inevitably, economic form. Much of Baker’s article is given over to business restiveness with a confrontational foreign policy. Politically, developing friction with the EU, Obama doing his best to bring Merkel and Hollande over to his side; economically, he notes: “The drive for more sanctions comes as American businesses are growing more vocal in protesting the possibility that the United States may act on its own. While lobbying the White House and Congress quietly until now, leading business groups plan to start a wide advertising campaign voicing their concerns.”

My New York Times Comment on Baker’s article, same date, follows:

Obama has dropped all pretense of constructive leadership and shows himself to be obsessed with confrontation and force. To be to the Right of the NAM and the Chamber of Commerce, esp. for a Democrat, requires some doing. But Obama is now a true ideologue, more warlike, more capitalist, more jingoist, than many traditional conservative groups.

Also more foolhardy, for he is now distancing himself from the EU—and worse, marching toward the edges of what seems his intent: to provoke submission from Russia, and then China (given his Pacific-first strategy), all at the risk of nuclear war.

Bad enough we as a nation have to endure massive surveillance of our own people, bad enough to have Kerry smother Sisi with love as journalists go to prison, bad enough that Obama is back to drone assassination and the use of the Espionage Act to prevent revelations of USG wrongdoing. But to an overt face-off against Putin when Putin has not given cause, is ugly, bizarre, madness, as though Obama wills intervention and war as politically expedient and somehow economically rejuvenating.

Radicals are passive and give Obama a free pass. Ironically, we must look to the business community to curb his appetite for war. Obama’s national security advisers to a person represent what we tend to call the Neo-Cons, passionate in their quest for US

UNILATERAL world dominance. The world, however, is changing, multipolar, tired of living under Cold War assumptions. Soon, America in splendid isolation.

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As for Putin's peace overtures, which policy makers derisively termed a "charm offensive," there are ample signs of a constructive posture. E.g., Neil MacFarquhar and Andrew Roth's NYT article, "Putin Presses Extension of Cease-Fire in Ukraine," (June 24), enumerates concrete steps which needed to be taken in his view, beginning with, on the 24th, pairing the call for the extension and the rescinding of the March resolution for authorizing armed force in Ukraine.

Predictably, the US interpreted the actions as fear of sanctions (my own: in Cold War parlance, Putin blinked first, thus whetting Obama's appetite for turning the screws tighter), yet Putin, speaking in Vienna, despite provocations, took the high road and urged Poroshenko to make the cease-fire longer and, more important, lead to something more. In Putin's own words: "To declare a cease-fire is not enough; it is necessary to start substantive talks on the nature of the problem."

Then at a news conference, he clarified further—neither Russian take-over of Eastern Ukraine nor encouragement of a breakaway state, but, in the reporters' account, "greater autonomy for Donetsk and Luhansk," Constitutional changes to which Kiev appeared "amenable." They correctly observed, "Mr. Putin said declaring a cease-fire and asking the rebels to disarm without addressing their long-term political grievances would yield nothing." To Obama, federalization, or even simple legal guarantees, is to compromise with the Devil. His fear is that Poroshenko will not be as compliant, i.e., anti-Russian, as was originally hoped. Obama may be right. [No, written the 25th; Poroshenko has ended the cease-fire on the 30th, and July 1 sees massive Ukrainian air and land attacks in the East.] Putin, again at the news conference: "If we see there are substantive talks, so that people in eastern Ukraine can finally understand how their legal interests will be guaranteed, then there is a high possibility of success." Comparing the respective approaches to the Ukrainian situation of Obama and Putin is to see the difference between setting a war trap and reaching out to the parties in a spirit of conciliation.

Putin does not want war. It's doubtful that Obama fully reciprocates that sentiment. The reporters, perhaps in spite of themselves or Times policy, bear out the preceding: "Mr. Putin said he was pleased by the first contacts on Monday [June 23] between the Kiev authorities and the rebel representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk. 'No big agreements were reached, but the fact that the dialogue has begun is a highly important moment,' he said." Obama doesn't do "dialogue," thought a sign of weakness at best, and instead takes on the role ordinarily assigned to Putin, the supposed KGB bully (for KGB substitute the letters, CIA or NSA), who is internally strong enough to engage for peace without fear his manhood is being questioned. On disarmament he observes, the reporters continue, that Ukraine "had not done enough to disarm a rabidly anti-Russian group called Right Sector. Without that, Mr. Putin said, it did not make sense to call on the militias in the east to disarm."

Those Monday discussions indicate a widening of the Putin-Obama gulf, for as the reporters make clear, "Russia had been pressuring Ukraine to talk directly to the rebels"; moreover, "Putin's public move to take the Russian armed forces out of the equation [something fellow Times reporters were loathe to admit, if at all] was evidently a means to endorse the first results from the talks." Horror of horrors, Poroshenko is going soft on us—is a new coup in the offing? They close: "The

Poroshenko peace plan proposes amnesty for rebel fighters who have not committed serious crimes, as well as safe passage for mercenaries seeking to return to Russia. He also calls for decentralization of the national government, which would allow for greater self-rule in the east, a critical Russian demand.”

Yes, on the 27th, as Andrew Higgins and David Herszenhorn’s NYT article heading makes clear, “Ukraine Signs Trade Agreement with European Union,” but the finer points hardly suggest an unqualified Obama victory over Putin and Russia. Russia, of course, was angry, envisioning the West’s attempt at absorbing into its orbit not only Ukraine but Georgia and Moldova, as part of a concerted effort to dismember the Russian Federation piece-by-piece, a not unreasonable assumption because generally bruited about in Neo-Con circles (though not mentioned by the reporters, themselves not even willing to credit the fact of a coup, simply saying that Poroshenko “won Ukraine’s presidential election in May to fill a post left vacant by Mr. Yanukovych’s flight from the country in February”). Angered, too, again not mentioned, that Ukraine would make possible the movement of NATO forces to the Russian border. But perhaps, contrary to US-EU hopes and expectations, Ukraine may want to opt out of the Cold War framework and current power-struggle. Poroshenko stated, “We use this possibility [trade agreement with the EU] to modernize the country. But we need only one thing—peace and security.” That which, one surmises, is not readily to hand when foreign troops (EU, as we’ll see, is not inviting Ukraine into NATO) are massed on the Russian border.

As of June 27, there is hope the cease-fire will be extended, perhaps indefinitely, to give negotiations a chance.

History is full of surprises; projections can prove futile. Knowing of the resumption of Kiev’s offensive, Poroshenko’s contradiction of earlier statements, and, brought out by Herszenhorn’s article, “Fighting Intensifies in Ukraine After Cease-Fire Is Ended,” (July 1), the readiness to label protesters in the East as terrorists (Poroshenko even considering the establishment of martial law), it is obvious that Putin’s overtures have come to naught and we are back to square one. I want to remain with Putin on the eve of termination, though, to make clear where I think responsibility for the crisis lies, not with Putin, but Kiev, the right-wing forces therein vocal, the US behind the scenes, and, occupying a middle position, the EU, led here by Germany and France, which through the 30th had engaged seriously with Poroshenko in peace discussions. Thus, a final look at Putin, before the Ukraine offensive.

Putin appears less concerned about the trade deal than the underlying political dynamics, in which, as he sees it, the West, rather than encouraging Ukraine with respect to trade relations, is forcing it to choose between the West and Russia, implying it cannot look in both directions and be neutral and autonomous. Implicitly Putin rejects the ideological dichotomy, you’re either for us or against us, and wants instead a Ukraine non-hostile to Russia in the context of independent action. He blames the EU for creating the crisis (also the 27th): “The acute crisis in this neighboring country seriously troubles us. The anti-constitutional coup in Kiev and attempts to artificially impose a choice between Europe and Russia on the Ukrainian people have pushed society toward a split and painful confrontation.”

Poroshenko’s initial renewal of the truce implied that he viewed the trade agreement as just that, affecting trade and not part of an anti-Russian mobilization of forces to promote confrontation.

When a Putin senior adviser, Sergei Glazyev, charged the Kiev government was “Nazi,” Putin’s spokesperson contradicted him, stating this was “not the official position” of Russia—perhaps further indication Putin seeks an accommodation rather than war with the Ukrainian government. Meanwhile, for reasons external to the trade accord, the EU has made clear in Brussels, the reporters write, “There is no chance of the European Union admitting Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova as members any time soon. Public opinion in Europe is hostile to any further expansion of a 28-nation bloc that is already widely seen as too big and too unwieldy.”

As for NATO, the US seemingly faces disappointment there too; instead of quick membership opening the pathway for an armed presence on the Russian border, the EU also is slowing down on that count. Here, Georgia is the subject, but a precedent is thereby set for considering Ukraine or not: “Russia has long viewed the European Union as a stalking horse for NATO but, in a move that could help allay such concerns, NATO foreign ministers decided in Brussels earlier this week that a summit meeting in September will not approve offering Georgia a formal step to membership.” Further sanctions against Russia, announced EU leaders in Brussels, would also be held in abeyance. Yet, positions change. With a resumption of warfare, the EU may welcome the chance to expand NATO operations. All bets are off.

JULY 7, 2014

### **Blackwater’s Death Machine**

Obama is excellent at multitasking in navigating the waters of international politics, seeking to construct a political-structural framework of American global hegemony, formally (for who knows the full extent of the forces standing behind him?) presiding over a Juggernaut of irresponsible power in which the US seemingly thwarted in one theater of operations then springs up in another. Obama the jumping jack, but with malice aforethought, ever moving forward through intervention, carefully-delineated war (at least that is the claim), regime change, drone assassination, CIA-JSOC joint-paramilitary operations, alliance systems to rationalize the internationalization of American power (as with NATO and “friends and allies”) often bilaterally arranged, affording joint-exercises and lucrative arms sales, and not least, the subject of this article, the use of PRIVATE ARMIES, which have an increasingly important role as occupation forces and for guarding US interests, facilities, and personnel worldwide.

By multitasking, I mean proving oneself at being adept in the service of ruling groups and the needs and objectives of the political economy, from establishing beachheads for business (commercial-financial penetration) to presenting a counterrevolutionary front onto the world on behalf of the security of US and global capitalism, wrapped in the protective shell of military omnipotence. This entails awareness of multiple pressure points, either to be worked with or destroyed, a geopolitical landscape itself forever in motion, so that, if not Russia, then China, if not China, then Iraq and Afghanistan, etc., etc., which is entirely befitting one who presides over US-defined processes of industrial and trade expansion within a world system unwilling to accept, because of its increasingly multipolar structure, American supervision. This still sporadic, but now more and more resolute, resistance to unconditional US supremacy in all that affects the world system, conforming in power-terms to the realities of structural change occurring over the last several decades, places emphasis on FORCE in maintaining its suzerainty. Diplomacy be damned

(except as camouflaged in liberal rhetoric to cover the relentless application of power), humanitarianism now being the spearhead for intervention and the expansion of spheres of influence.

This is not to suggest Obama's expertise in international politics and economics; he has a pedestrian mind (run-of-the-mill intelligence, impressionable when confronted by financial and military arcanum), nimble mental processes (except becoming congealed when his considerable defense-mechanisms go up), antennae out for what sells, personally ingratiates, or aligns with instruments of power, genial on the surface, harboring desires for recognition based on an imagined sense of hurt and deprivation which gives license for belligerence, power, cruelty in national and world affairs. Consider his engagement with drone assassination, the vaporization of fellow human beings thousands of miles away, or the impoverishment and growing underclass his actions support, again, fellow human beings, as policy further enriches the already very wealthy. His psychological attachment to power brings him closer to financial, military, and intelligence elites, leading to an aggressive role in the massive surveillance of the American people, contrariwise, the near-absolute secrecy of government, in which transparency per se is feared as a form of terrorism (witness the fulsome use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers).

To know Obama is to understand better the relationship between the government and Blackwater, which is a particularly vicious form of private army, free-wheeling, trigger-happy, cloaked in patriotism, and demanding and receiving for itself complete immunity for the crimes it commits. These, however, are not crimes in ordinary parlance, because sanctioned by, and done in the name of, the government, which shares its ideology of force, righteousness, superiority. Mowing down the innocent, along with engaging in promiscuity on the government's time, both revealed by investigators, are o.k., so long as counterterrorism can be a screen by which to hide behind. Under Obama's umbrella, Blackwater was safe because deemed essential—and because there was a tinge of fear about going against it. When strength for questionable purposes is asked, one turns to the strongest, which follows an authoritarian mindset characteristic of the society.

Damage control is one area of his expertise bound to arise, given his record of war, drone assassination, regime change, and now, the use of private contractors, who are accorded (as are the military), through the status-of-forces agreements imposed where American intervention occurs, diplomatic immunity from punishment for the commission of crimes in the assigned country. Getting away with murder is both figurative and literal. A notorious case, in September 2007, occurred when Blackwater trucks entered a busy Baghdad traffic circle and, in a hurry and given prior immunity for their actions, simply cleared the way through spraying the area with machine-gun fire and killing 17 Iraqis. The "Ugly American" of the 1950s was Adonis compared with these mercenaries, themselves well-connected both with right-wing support in Congress and the Executive, and doing guard duty at foreign embassies as well as working with the CIA in conducting armed drone missions of assassination.

A private army, its usage is interrelated with the militarism-driven public policy that has shaped the confrontational posture toward Russia and China, and the broader context of counterrevolution where "Enemies" become defined and visited upon by all the majesty of military might. Proceed with impunity is the watchword for American forces, whether at an Iraqi traffic circle, a Pakistan or Yemen funeral procession (by definition bad guys because at the burial of the Bad Guy we just vaporized via a drone strike), or the numerous black-hole prisons around the globe recruited

through rendition. Civilian or military, it makes little difference: impunity bears the imprimatur of Exceptionalism.

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When Matt Apuzzo's article in *The Times* appeared, "In a U.S. Court, Iraqis Accuse Blackwater of Killings in 2007," (June 25), the readers in their Comments for the most part blamed Bush for the massacre yet, not the event so much as the cover-up, seeing no relation whatever to Obama and his administration for the subsequent fate of the perpetrators (nil) or participation in the cover-up. Obama, DOJ, Pentagon, even the media, a deafening silence, now broken, but Obama as always sheathed in protective armor. A century-and-a-third ago, ruling groups used Pinkertons to suppress the American labor movement (the Great Railroad Strikes of 1877). Now, ruling groups, better organized, more powerful, use a different private army, Blackwater, to class and systemic hegemony, a similar end, only on a broader basis, across the globe, directly reaching or affecting a wider constituency, all who stand in the way, or even seem to, of US foreign policy. The privatization of repression remains a constant in American history, whether as goons and scabs making up private armies or corporate executives in three-piece suits under marching orders to squeeze every bit of life from the masses through consumerism, indebtedness, and stagnant wages—a social system therefore whose motivating impulse is the differentiation of rich and poor, the former, more concentrated through time, the latter, more numerous.

Barrington Moore's concept of legitimated violence, in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, has resonance to our topic—the interrelatedness of actions and developments criminal in any meaningful sense yet falling inside and protected by the law as, if nothing else, the normalization of power, indeed, power as a law to itself, no questions asked, either by political leaders or most historians. Thus falling under his concept, for present purposes, would be a political economy making for the formation of an underclass of today at home and worldwide, and the gunning down of people at a Baghdad intersection, or for that matter, the Washington tricksters seeking to trap Putin and Russia into false moves justifying massive retaliation in the name of an international system they themselves are eroding if not destroying in the name of a higher law, yes, the "moral" utility of Exceptionalism. All of the foregoing come to mind as derivable from Moore's classification of crimes which Authority in its prerogatives and power defines as noncrimes, erasing lines between the private and public spheres of life, just so long as the System has been served, refined, perpetuated.

Obama is the perfect *dramatis personae* in microcosm of one who thrives on a legal order to camouflage his illegal acts—which of course cannot be judged illegal because, as in massive surveillance he has a dummy court, the FISA Court, to back him up, and in drone assassination, the presumably authoritative memos of DOJ and the Office of Legal Counsel. So, too, Blackwater, with pick-and-choose justifications from the myriad operations of government and stretched-out interpretations of Congress. Obama did not invent the System, its practices, or its rationales, but neither did he qualify or oppose their workings. To blame Bush for being on the ground floor when Blackwater members exploded in Baghdad, and stop there, begs the question of what Obama did or didn't do for six going on seven years after as the CRIME festered in at least the eyes of the victims' families and Iraqis in general, if not a world encouraged to forget and/or bought off to look the other way. Obama is USG in fact as well as in symbol, and, under his watch, there is a matter of accountability for repression in continuous effect, whatever its origins. One wonders how many

other acts of legitimated violence occurred and still occur during his reign, by Blackwater, CIA-JSOC operations, or the use of embargoes to bring civilian populations to their knees?

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Apuzzo writes, “The Nisour Square shooting is a signature point in the Iraq war, one that inflamed anti-American sentiment abroad and contributed to the impression that Americans were reckless and unaccountable. The Iraqi government wanted to prosecute the security contractors in Iraq, but the American government refused to allow it.” I must comment at the outset: not only was our stooge-Iraqi government incensed enough by the evident crime to want to prosecute, but USG, by the very terms of the intervention, forbade it. Of the latter point, civilian contractors, coming under the status-of-forces agreements or similar exonerative measures binding local authorities NOT to prosecute for crimes committed in their jurisdiction, are or should be considered war criminals (and the nation employing them, guilty of war crimes) every bit as much as if they were members of the armed forces. In fact, we see government prosecution a solemn farce, and perhaps the use of civilians a deliberate ploy to fend off international condemnation calling for a proper accounting of the nation itself.

The Bush administration in 2008 began a half-hearted effort carried out by DOJ: “When the Justice Department indicted five former Blackwater guards in 2008 and reached a plea deal with a sixth, prosecutors said it was a message that, whether in a war zone or not, nobody was above the law.” Not so, more like damage control because the offense was so flagrant that to do nothing was not an option. Apuzzo notes: “But the case has suffered repeated setbacks, frequently of the government’s own making. In Iraq, the delays contributed to the impression that Blackwater operated with impunity. Prosecutors ultimately dropped charges against one guard, citing a lack of evidence, and have gone to trial against the remaining four.” Yet, given the 17 deaths, the paucity and downgrading of the charges is nauseating, especially when the reporter observes: “For the most part, the horrors of the Nisour Square shooting are uncontested. Nobody disputes that a team of Blackwater guards, working for the State Department [under Hilary, I might add, the firm’s services continued], drove four armored trucks into a busy traffic circle and opened fire.” Of the four standing trial, three faced manslaughter charges, and the fourth, a murder charge.

Even there, the protracted nature of the trial, along with the multiplicity of witnesses brought over one at a time or in small numbers, created conditions which opened the way for inconsistency in testimony, chiefly turning on which of the five fired the first shot, by which to determine the murder charge. Under the circumstances, the defense had a field day gladly jumping into the confusion to discredit witnesses. Too, because the travel arrangements were courtesy of the FBI, I am mistrustful, having observed at first hand during Mississippi Freedom Summer their devotion to civil liberties and the rule of law: browbeat the complainant, not the perpetrator. Bush’s DOJ initiated the prosecution, yet without providing the substantive underpinnings, but six years later, the trickle of witnesses finally begins. My point, however, going back to civilian contractors and questionable court proceedings, is that privatization, in so wide a stretch of society, should not, as seems to happen, be a get-out-of-jail card. More basic still, why such puny charges, instead of handing over the defendants to the International Criminal Court?

The answer is self-explanatory: Obama’s rule-of-thumb, never admit wrongdoing, is similar in spirit and procedure to the Israelis, i.e., never prosecute one of your own, no matter how heinous the



crime. For one, using live ammunition to shoot down children throwing stones, for the other, clearing intersections with machine-gun fire, either from impatience for traffic delay or cold-blooded enjoyment of shooting down civilians. It is difficult to determine who learns from whom, Americans learning from Israelis, or Israelis, from Americans. Occurrences of “collateral damage” are so numerous as not to draw attention, much less, if attention is drawn, to call for punishment, the victim’s alleged inferiority often assumed.

(These remarks may seem inappropriate and insensitive in light of the discovery of the bodies of the three Israeli youths who were murdered. I mourn their loss and grieve for their loved ones. But the larger picture does not change. Repression is a sickly force; one speculates that respect for and fair-treatment of the Palestinians would never have brought about the tragedies found on a daily basis. Like the deaths of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, the moral lessons of respect for human life and dignity have not been learned, and perhaps cannot be when the structure of society encourages violence and hatred. As if to underscore the tragedy of domination, cause and consequence of repression in the first place, we see the reprisal, the murder of a Palestinian youth burned alive as shown by forensic evidence, whose death I also mourn, and record here the words of Ahmad Tibi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Parliament, who contrasts the three-week search for the kidnappers and the actions to find Muhammad Abu Khdeir’s killer or killers: “It’s an ordinary message that the life of Jewish Israelis is much more valuable than the life of others, especially Palestinians. This is a double standard, both moral and political, and it’s part of the anger in the street here, about what the Israelis are doing to our lives.”)

On shooting down civilians in Nisour Square, this is the trial testimony of Sarhan Moniem, a traffic officer, who “held up two hands, showing how he pleaded with the American security contractors to stop.” Apuzzo continues: “‘There was a lady. She was screaming and weeping about her son and asking for help,’ Mr. Moniem said. He showed the jurors how she had cradled her dead son’s head on her shoulder. ‘I asked her to open the door so I could help her. But she was paying attention only to her son.’”

Another witness, the first in the trial, Mohammed Kinani, “broke down last week [yes after nearly seven years from the time of the shooting, the trial has just begun in Washington, near the Capitol] as he talked about his 9-year-old son, Ali, who was shot in the head while riding in the back seat of the family car. Mr. Kinani sobbed so uncontrollably that Judge Royce C. Lamberth sent the jury out of the room.” The reporter adds, “The next day, one juror said she had been too haunted to sleep. The judge excused her from service.” Wouldst Obama be “too haunted to sleep,” for the crimes he has committed against humanity, and he, too, be “excused...from service” by the American people.

Finally, Majed Gharbawi, a 55-year-old commodity trader, testified, on the 24th, that “he was riding in a small truck with his friend Osama Abbas when the shooting started directly in front of them. Mr. Gharbawi tried to run away and was hit in the abdomen. As he slumped to the ground, he said, he saw another man who had been shot. ‘He was screaming and praying to god, for Allah to save him from this calamity,’ Mr. Gharbawi testified. In Islam, he explained, it is customary for the dying to say a final prayer. ‘So I told him, let’s do that together.’”

Apuzzo concludes the witness’s testimony, a passage I would like to see tacked up in the room off the Situation Room, purported to be where Obama and his advisers look over the hit list for the

next round of assassinations—the White House analogue to Blackwater practices in constructing a methodology of death: “As Mr. Gharbawi lay in the street, Mr. Abbas also tried to run. He did not make it far. ‘His body was shaking violently as the bullets were piercing him and hitting the sidewalk,’ Mr. Gharbawi said. He said the American security guards kept shooting at Mr. Abbas EVEN AFTER HE WAS ON THE GROUND, CLEARLY DEAD.” (caps., mine)

Who are the true psychopaths, the ones doing the shootings, those who hire them—in the name of the people—to do the shootings, the American people complicit in the enterprise of global hegemony—or all three, and the framework for legitimating war, intervention, murder, social and economic pillage, in our name?

My New York Times Comment on the Apuzzo article, same date, follows:

The shootings occurred in Sept. 2007. Why nearly seven years delay? Blackwater is pure American, a privatization of mercenaries, murder, and intervention. The State Dept. in all this time has done nothing and probably still keeps Blackwater on the payroll (under its new corporate name and logo). Is it any wonder the US is increasingly despised in the world? Private armies with license to kill, quite a testimony to American democracy.

With the FBI handling details, one can suppose a whitewash. Habeas corpus rights denied to detainees previews the US judicial system (as does the FISA Court), so how expect justice to be done? Clearing that intersection with machine guns was reported at the time as Blackwater impatience to get through a crowded area. Allowed for seven years to remain out of sight speaks volumes about the status of forces agreement, the cynicism of intervention, and yes, the cover-up of US criminal activity.

I’m sorry Moniem and fellow Iraqis participate in this farce. They are hoodwinked. There will be no justice, merely damage control. And what of countless other unjustified killings, which will not even see the semblance of prosecution? Blackwater on one hand, Obama, with his hit list and targeted assassination on the other, and in between, CIA-JSOC paramilitary operations geared to regime change, together constitute the package of Obama’s liberal humanitarianism, bringing democracy to the ignorant at gunpoint.

JULY 11, 2014

### **Rampaging Surveillance**

Consuming guilt, especially when buried deeply in the American institutional framework of government, requires global surveillance, both to maximize hegemonic effectiveness (in order to anticipate and parry countermoves) and prevent exposure—to ourselves and the world at large—of the political-ideological-military drive for unilateral power. The more engaged in the hegemonic enterprise, the greater is there the necessity for stifling criticism and seeking its universal detection at home and abroad. Hegemony is cause and consequence of massive surveillance, here at home (per se vitiating any claim to a democratic society) and, presently in the spotlight, Germany, a full-court CIA-NSA press, beyond eavesdropping on Merkel’s cell phone to include the German population and foreign ministry in America’s state-of-the-art Vacuum Cleaner (even a listening device on the roof of the American Embassy in Berlin).

Why pick on a close ally? The core of the hegemonic quest, along side of suppressed guilt, is insecurity, not just the anxiety of discovery but also the rigidity of the authoritarian pattern which fears disclosure will spoil the whole game plan. For Obama, transparent government is inimical to the stealth required for ruling-groups' ascendancy in America (itself a defining purpose of his presidency and administration) and the acute militarization of US foreign policy (Kennan's containment, Dulles's liberation policy, is now amplified to include simultaneous confrontation on two fronts—China and Russia—in a manner perhaps signaling the willingness to go to the mat: the nuclear option.

Obama, for all his "charm," has something to prove, a bottomless pit of envy, ambition, obtuseness as a way of confronting moral principles, together a boiling cauldron on the need for personal recognition in ever-defensive mode lest he be found out for the charlatan he really is. As in the German spying case(s), for now we have another, but on the first, the news spread everywhere, we have Mazzetti and Landler in *The Times*, the article, "Spying Case Left Obama in Dark, U.S. Officials Say," affording him deniability from being caught flatfooted for CIA spying on a close ally. Usually very good reporters on intelligence activities, here they futz around straining to give Obama an out for his accountability on a highly serious matter: the potential rupture in relations, wherein US policy makers view Germany as central to the EU's cohesion in staring down Putin and ultimately weakening if not dismembering Russia. And with Russia in decline, next in line is China (for which Obama's Pacific-first strategy, already concentrating military resources in the region, along with beefing up alliances, conducting joint-maneuvers, and pushing the Trans-Pacific Partnership), which, from that point, places America at the pinnacle of power.

So, the German spying case may seem unimportant (and administration figureheads are doing their best to downgrade its significance), yet Merkel's vigorous response, which has come after so much else, the expulsion of the CIA station chief being a decisive act, suggests the united front against Russia (as well as EU's hostility to Russia) may be breaking down. The house of cards is in danger of falling. Thus Obama's call to Merkel (July 3) was "to consult with a close ally and to mobilize wavering Europeans to put more pressure on Russia to end its covert incursions in Ukraine," an important agenda (whether or not correct about "covert incursions," to which *The Times* dutifully follows the party line), sufficiently important as to place Obama above the fray: "What Mr. Obama did not know was that a day earlier, a young German intelligence operative had been arrested and had admitted that he had been passing secrets to the Central Intelligence Agency."

Whether the reporters were being disingenuous or simply relying too heavily on their government sources (as though an Iron Curtain was raised in Washington to surround and protect Obama), the natural inclination was to find a scapegoat, uncharacteristically, the CIA itself: "While Ms. Merkel chose not to raise the issue during the call, the fact that the president was kept in the dark about the blown spying operation at a particularly delicate moment in American relations with Germany has led frustrated White House officials to question who in the C.I.A.'s chain of command was aware of the case—and why that information did not make it to the Oval House before the call." Given Merkel's politeness, how far the information went is irrelevant, for bringing it up would have stirred a hornet's nest, the last thing Obama wanted after the Snowden revelations, i.e., "that the N.S.A. had tapped Ms. Merkel's cellphone."

Nevertheless, the CIA was Obama's safety hatch to escape: "A central question, one American official said, is how high the information [CIA knew three weeks before about the planned arrest of

its agent] about the agent went in the C.I.A.'s command—whether it was bottled up at the level of the station chief in Berlin or transmitted to senior officials, including the director, John O. Brennan, who is responsible for briefing the White House.” It is doubtful that heads will roll, but the reporters make a significant point (in line with my foregoing characterization of Obama), his obduracy, his absolute refusal to admit a wrong: “For all his concerns, Mr. Obama does not plan any extraordinary outreach to Ms. Merkel, an official said, noting that some in the administration also feel that Germany should not overreact to the case or conflate it with the privacy issues raised by the N.S.A.'s surveillance.” Heaven forbid such conflation (!)—in reality, the unified pattern (here NSA and CIA appear to be wearing each other's shoes), this with respect to Germany, but in the larger picture conflation in the US as well under different terms: massive surveillance and abridgment of civil liberties.

If we go back four days, to Alison Smale's article in *The Times*, “German Man Arrested as Spy Implicates U.S.,” we find that as the story breaks, other newsworthy aspects of the US-German relationship come to light, first, a reason for the tension, beyond the obvious spying, is that the American government has not been forthcoming “with what German officials called a swift clarification of the case.” That was July 4th; one week later, still little or none. For want of a better term, let's call USG's response, stonewalling. This comes, incidentally, as Smale notes, “just months after the collapse of an effort by Germany to strike a ‘no spy’ accord with the White House.” That in fact is the third stumbling block before the recent case: NSA's “monitoring of Germans' electronic data,” covering millions of German citizens; the Merkel eavesdropping; and America's unwillingness to sign an accord. Related to all three, Obama “ordered a complete review of spying on allies and partners,” and as is the wont of these reviews, nothing was done. On stopping the practices: “But in conversations with German officials over the past year, the Obama administration has made clear that its commitment extends only to Ms. Merkel herself, and not other German officials.” As to the German public, any cessation of spying is doubtful—hence the growing distrust of the US.

On July 7, still before the deniability piece, Jane Perlez wrote in *The Times*, “Spy Scandal Tails Merkel All the Way to Beijing,” that Merkel was truly angered by what happened, enough to say, in undiplomatic language in her meeting with Prime Minister Li, “If the reports are correct it would be a serious case,” And all the Embassy, breaking its official silence, could say, was: “We are working with the German government to ensure this issue is resolved appropriately.” One consequence of US spying is that it was drawing Germany and China closer together, already on a firm footing with Volkswagen's \$2.4B investment in China and Lufthansa's code-sharing agreement with Air China. Li stated at their news conference: “China and Germany, it can be said, are both victims of hacking attacks.” The common culprit did not have to be named.

And with all that transpired in just one week, we also see Smale's second piece, “New Case of Spying Is Alleged by Germany,” July 9, in which she nails down the broader picture, a questioning of the alliance itself: “Anger at Washington mounted Wednesday with the disclosure that American intelligence agents were suspected of having recruited a second spy in Germany, this time linked to its Defense Ministry, prompting even robust allies of the United States to suggest that a fundamental reset was needed in one of the most important of trans-Atlantic partnerships.” This second case led to a German Parliamentary Committee hurrying to New York and Washington, its

head stating in a telephone interview: “The U.S. must understand what psychological damage it is inflicting. I think that will be a difficult process.”

At the moment of writing (July 10), we see a more-than-minor diplomatic bombshell dropped by the German government, reported in Smale and Melissa Eddy’s article in *The Times*, “Germany Demands Top U.S. Intelligence Officer Be Expelled,” in which they write: “Germany’s relations with the United States plunged to a low point Thursday, with the government demanding the expulsion of the chief American intelligence official stationed here because, it said, Washington has refused to cooperate with German inquiries into United State intelligence activities.” Yes, Obama’s obduracy, USG as a whole, in stonewalling mode. The German anger rests on well-nurtured ground, NSA’s “monitoring the digital communications of millions of Germans,” and the agency’s monitoring of Merkel’s cellphone. The State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, has been the public face of USG obtuseness, mixed with cunning, as of late: ”Our relationship with Germany is extremely important. We’ll continue our dialogue through senior officials in the days and weeks ahead.” What DIALOGUE?

My New York Times Comment on the Smale-Eddy article, same date, follows:

As an advocate for American moderation in world affairs, as opposed to what, in the period since World War II aftermath, obsessed with unilateral global hegemony, the US has become, I’m not surprised at the friction. Stupidity is hardly what matters; amoral cynicism, hubris, delusions of grandeur, arrogance, singly and combined, describes America’s foreign policy—and as a result, we will see continued friction, ultimately, the break-up of the alliance system and the US universally deemed a Pariah Nation (to go along with an already-realized National Security State).

Massive surveillance is a spreading cancer, the NSA a genteel version of the Gestapo, and Obama, who in the revelation of the first spying case has been afforded deniability, presides over a process of the liberalization of fascism, i.e., humanitarian rhetoric to disguise war, intervention, and, his specialty, drone assassination.

Merkel is no Left figure, which makes her anger all the germane to the issue of just how far America has moved to the Right. One cannot shake off her criticism, and the recall of our top intelligence agent in Germany speaks volumes for the rapidly disintegrating trust necessary to the alliance.

Obama is a menace to civil liberties at home and abroad. Yet his supporters are either complicit in his depredations or are simply blind, the kind that see no evil, hear no evil. Sorry, but there’s plenty of EVIL out there, as in openly provoking hostilities with both Russia and China.

JULY 14, 2014

### **Cynicism, Israeli National Policy**

The irony of history, when descendants of the Holocaust commit localized holocausts of their own, is presently, and for some time has been, before us, now, the bombing of a center for the disabled by Israeli missiles in Gaza. Why not, Israelis think—and do not stop to ask, why Hamas

rockets in the first place, Palestinians especially knowing the futility of their actions, that they are hopelessly overpowered and outgunned, that “shock and awe” awaits them...and yet they persist. They persist because otherwise is to suffer a different form of gas chamber, the slow death of humiliation, overcrowding, poverty, and, publicly admitted, “the grass needs periodic cutting” to keep them in their place. Actually “cynicism” is too kind a term (Webster’s “sneering disbelief in” (fill in the word: democracy, humanity, integrity, etc.), because the sneer, already now emptied of moral content, is backed by the ruthless application of force to make its point.

To be the “Chosen People” is not license for ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and worse, unscrupulousness with regard to human life; in fact, just the reverse, a standard to live up to, in this case, the ethical principles of Torah which knowingly or not are inscribed in the DNA of all Jewish radicals, whether Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, or Schwerner and Goodman, Chaney’s compatriots in the depraved murders by white Mississippians. Indeed, in America, there was a time when Jews and Blacks formed the nucleus of progressive change, or at the very least based our closeness (for I speak as a Jew, who from my early teens pushed for interracial justice) on the mutual recognition of having suffered oppression. That nexus, regrettably, has broken down in Black expressions of racial solidarity for Obama (an authoritarian monster if there ever was one) and Jewish blindness to Israeli war crimes.

It is important to speak frankly. This is crisis-time in America, a wholesale shift to the Right, when liberalism itself is tarnished by its complicity (again, too charitable a term; in reality, outright leadership) in war, intervention, regime change, impoverishment of large sections of the globe, and, a sure sign of impending fascism at home, the massive surveillance of the American people. In and of themselves, we have been through these practices before, but NEVER in the climate of present apathy, self-indulgence and moral blindness. There had always been resistance before, spearheads in industrial unionism, in left-wing politics, in everyday opposition to the mega-structures of American capitalism and commensurate red-baiting to keep radicals in line. Repression has been the raw stuff of American history as the basis for and precondition to the prevailing consensus of today, so that one-by-one the sources of progressive change—Jews, Blacks, the labor movement, engaged clergy (as in the antiwar/civil rights movements, for both owed their strength to their reciprocal nature), grass-roots organization of myriad kinds, in which Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign summarized decades of protest, like tenants’ strikes in Harlem in the interwar period, or before that, agrarian protest and prairie radicalism—are benumbed, lost in the welter of pressures from consumerism to patriotism to just plain social paralysis.

Is this a tangent from discussion of the Israeli attack on a center for the disabled, not to mention the promiscuous selection of targets designed to terrorize a people in the name of Israeli justice? No it’s not. American Jewry has been the shield behind which Israel hides, or rather, strikes out at others while manipulating US public opinion to do its bidding. Jewish radicalism, so proud a tradition in the New Deal years and as late as into the 1960s, has all but lost its voice. Matching the racial solidarity of Blacks toward Obama, it allows AIPAC to present a party line Maoists at their best in the Cultural Revolution would have envied. To most self-regarding Jews in America today, anything goes, Palestinians being a despicable people, unclean, Golda Meir’s schwartzas, or the Israeli Establishment’s equally pejorative reading of fellow human beings. What happened to Jewish radicalism, the nobility of struggle on behalf of all peoples, a spirit with which I grew up and instinctively felt?

Israel has become the worst-case scenario of the degradation of Torah, and worst-case scenario of what was once the deep unadulterated humaneness of worldwide Jews, a people under whose capacious tent one could simultaneously honor Marx and Freud, and equally honor non-Jews, from Paul Robeson to Arturo Toscanini, two of my favorites from late childhood. The people who experienced the most loathsome tragedy in modern times, which should have led to compassion by survivors and descendants alike, more than compassion, the placement of human freedom above all else, have proven ourselves unworthy of our heritage of oppression and thirst for a life based on justice and equality. Perhaps the human being internalizes persecution or its threat as a warning to flee from independence and grasp for safety and security. Perhaps the human constitution accepts limits as a condition of survival, and when possible, strikes out at perceived threats—or merely delights in conquest and cruelty. I'd like to think otherwise, that humanity is forever projecting from within itself widening the scope of freedom for all.

At least, that is what one Jewish person was, not even taught to believe, but rather took for granted as the path to life itself. Israelis by their actions callously mock the teachings of our religion. Whether one is a believer or nonbeliever, Judaism has until recently had its cultural roots in the Jewish psyche, even when God was an open question the possibility of some form of retribution being present should love of humanity be abandoned. The present Gaza bombardment is sickening, and in addition to the loss of life among Palestinians serves to drive deeper the blackness-and-blankness of our souls, a feeling of impunity that Israelis can play God themselves—or even displace God altogether in their pursuit of madness and power. Meanwhile, the world turns away, a collective resister of violence when it has been committed against the powerless.

Netanyahu has become a World Citizen in one easy leap to fame. Killing the disabled is emblematic of today's statesmanship. He is in friendly competition with Obama, who is glued to his hit list of targeted assassination. Will either Israel or America ever receive their just deserts? It is far easier to demonize Putin and Li, in the American case, than to look candidly and honestly at America's demanding for itself global supremacy, at the cost of suffering abroad and despotic corporate rule and social control at home.

JULY 16, 2014

### **Israel's Goliath to Palestine's David**

Today Israel resumed its attack on Gaza, presumably in response to rocket launches into Israeli territory. I say "presumably," because it seeks and has sought, from the initial displacement of the Palestinian people from their homes, using force, repression, and violence, since the early days of post-World War II settlement, any and every opportunity to advance an exterminationist policy directed against them. A humane world religion, giving birth in modern times to leading radicals, scholars, philosophers, writers, leaders of the working class, indeed, wherever the cause of social justice was championed, including the civil rights movement, has, for the last four decades, turned sour, ugly, cynical, in its blind defense of an Israel—constituted as a Warrior State taking pride in the subjugation of others, supporting dictators on the world scene, identifying itself with assassination—which represents the falsification of everything good and decent the religion and the Jewish people expressed and acted upon as willing participants in social struggles making no distinctions among humankind.

This extreme perversion of its former self is difficult to explain, but the way Israel was developed and how Israel came to be a precipitate of modern Judaism, the wraparound dark glasses of the Strongman, proving to all a hardness, toughness, bulldozing homes, elevating militarism into a national ideology, has to be part of the explanation, with American Jewry falling into line, indeed, going well beyond Israel to embrace the very forces responsible for oppression, past and present, that had already degraded the previous generations who fought for human rights, our own included. As a Jew, I do not consider myself a “self-hating Jew,” a vicious charge worthy of Goebbels to silence dissent within the Jewish Community.

Obviously I am not a psychoanalyst, and gladly accept criticism for what follows, but Israel’s behavior, the actual record of its government, its cooperation with retrograde forces in the world (e.g., the US military and intelligence communities), its support of the wars, interventions, regime changes of its friends and allies, its hatred of and opposition to national liberation struggles, and at home its avowedly racist value system (“racist” in deeming and judging others inferior, unworthy, unclean), implementation of policies specifically to disparage the identity and break the will of the Palestinians, and construction of a mythology of victimhood while meting out punishment, seemingly for its own sake, to the pervasive Other.

Hermetically sealed in self-righteousness (only American Jews, in defense of Israel, exceed them in that capacity), Israelis have somehow come full circle from the unspeakable Nazi atrocities practiced against the Jewish people. “Somehow” is a term that covers much ground, generally open to dispute, as in all psychoanalytic interpretation, but what I see, from the observable behavior and expression of values, is the introjection of the persecutor’s mindset—the Holocaust as breeding ground and seminal historical experience—to account for internalizing the poisons of superior force and hatred imposed on a captive people. Jews, while not alone in this Nazification of the contemporary psyche, have, because of their direct exposure to the gas chambers and concentration camps, have become particularly vulnerable to appeals of power, strength, even invincibility—whether as compensation for the past or to ward off a similar fate in the future, but in either case, wholesale contempt for and dismissal of the perspective and fate of the victim.

Palestinians, like Blacks in the American South through at least the 1970s, were viewed as open-season for hunting humans, i.e., forced to accept subordination, humiliation, menial labor, limited education, in sum, always taught their place (the Israeli phrase recently surfacing in the American press, the periodic need for “cutting the grass” or “mowing the lawn,” which means teaching Palestinians to know and keep their place through bombardments, police tactics, turning the screws of repression on and off, whatever it takes to maintain superiority). Fronting the world through an absolutistic ethos of authoritarian pride and a reliance on force, the message both to the world itself and those subject to Israel’s dominance, is not a hopeful sign for peace in the Middle East, nor the revitalization of Jewish Humanism, let alone an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

My New York Times Comment to Jodi Rudoren and Anne Barnard’s article, “Israel Resumes Attack After Militants Spurn Cease-Fire Plan,” (July 15), follows. The article, as the heading suggests, places the onus on Hamas for Israel’s actions, although in fairness to the reporters, the description of the damage and deaths inflicted by its attack are brought out. My reason for writing, however, is not to take issue with the account, but, first, to discuss the current situation and its wider background, the Comment proper, and second, because in replies to my Comment I encountered a wall of such hostility directed against the Palestinians as practically subhuman and, less important,



my implied traitorousness as a Jew, that, in addition, a reply to the replies appeared warranted and necessary—one respondent even daring me to reply (same date as the article):

## I

Gaza is densely populated; the Israeli airstrikes are inhumane, with casualties and resulting presumed capitulation the objective. Egypt under the military government is a questionable source for a fair-minded ceasefire proposal. Your article states the problem clearly: “The question...is where a cease-fire would lead, and whether it would bring any change to Gaza.”

No, cease-fire is merely a return to the status quo, blockade and all. Israel has lost all moral standing in the world through its promiscuous campaign of shock and awe, including the bombing of a center for the disabled, as well as the large number of children and women killed by the campaign. Should a land invasion follow, this would be, if it is not already, a sad day in the history of Judaism.

The Israeli leadership is brazen to the point of leaving hubris and contempt for world opinion far behind. Cruelty of this kind finds no place in Torah, and the reported silencing of criticism is but one more indication of the corruption of the Jewish spirit of Freedom, a process underway, now at a galloping rate, since perhaps the 1960s, before which American Jews in particular were in the forefront of progressive politics, esp. the struggle for civil rights and resistance to the rabid anticommunism of McCarthyism and—still with us—its subsequent expounders.

## II

I do respond. I am a proud Jew; my wife reads Torah in our Saturday morning minyan. But I am a Jew of another generation, one involved in the civil rights and antiwar movements, one who experienced American Jewry as a progressive force.

I see Israel as a disgrace to the eloquence, humanity, and social justice of Judaism as a world religion and global ethical experience. Not Neo-Cons of today itching for war, not American Jews and Israelis alike, who see Palestinians as vermin and worse (Golda’s famous remark about Schwarzas), not Mossad with its assassinations, not the Israel of today who use disproportionate force to enforce the degradation of another people.

If things go hard with Israel on the international scene, it won’t be because of so-called “self-hating Jews,” the way Israelis and AIPAC described all Jewish critics of Israeli policies and actions, but God who punishes Jews who commit murder in His name.

I’m embarrassed by all the replies to my Comment, because, rather than reasoned analysis I find only this massive defense-reaction which ignores the initial ethnic cleansing of an indigenous population, the stranglehold of the blockade, the callous shooting of children in the intafadas. Would world Jewry of today be jubilant if all Palestinians were exterminated? My guess is Yes, so full of hate we’ve become as a people.

JULY 17, 2014

**Guernica, 1937 / Gaza, 2014**

April 26, 1937, late afternoon, German bombers higher in the air, Heinkel fighters just above treetops, bombed and strafed a small market town—the prelude to World War Two—crowded because it was market day, in effect, as Goering later said, a trial run to see what it takes to destroy a city—like eugenic experiments, this the perfection of the methodology and techniques of massive death and destruction. The population were mere guinea pigs, as all victims of war crimes, to the desensitized, dehumanized perpetrators of murder.

Noel Monks, the British war correspondent, having survived the strafing of the Heinkel 52s on his way there, could see toward evening the flames of the city. “As we drew nearer,” he writes, “on both sides of the road, men, women and children were sitting, dazed. I saw a priest in one group. I stopped the car and went up to him. ‘What happened, Father?’ I asked. His face was blackened, his clothes in tatters. He couldn’t talk. He just pointed to the flames, still about four miles away, then whispered: ‘Aviones...bombas’...mucho, mucho.’”

Upon arriving, his account continues, he “was immediately pressed into service by some Basque soldiers, collecting charred bodies that the flames had passed over. Some of the soldiers were sobbing like children. There were flames and smoke and grit, and the smell of burning human flesh was nauseating. Houses were collapsing into the inferno.” The description continues; suffice it to say, he concludes: “A sight that haunted me for weeks was the charred bodies of several women and children huddled together in what had been the cellar of a house. It had been a refugio.”

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Where is our Picasso today to represent the horrors of Israel’s aggression in Gaza? Our Noel Monk to show first-hand the suffering of the Gazan people, which television and press alike continually discount in America and through censorship are still more one-sided or refrain from covering altogether in Israel? A slight exception is Jodi Rudoren and Anne Barnard’s New York Times article, “100,000 Gazans Told to Flee as Both Sides Press Attacks,” (July 16), although, as its heading shows, the bias remains, as though both sides mounted equal attacks on the other (with no hint of the antecedent conditions in which the rockets of Hamas were a response to long-term occupation, desperation, degradation—met by weapons of significantly greater lethality).

I invoke the Guernica example, not for spurious comparison or analogy, but because its occurrence is inscribed in the very DNA of modern historical oppression, in this case possessing precisely the same elements of overwhelming force on a largely defenseless population, in this case, having less to do with stopping rockets than a) terrorizing a people into abject submission, and b) testing out aerial warfare to soften an enemy and perhaps even clear the way for ground action—beyond consolidating settlement gains in the territories, also serving notice on Iran and whomever else (viz., Arab democracy) is viewed as a real or potential threat down the road. Gaza especially, along with the West Bank, is the display case for advertising Israeli might to the region and the world, and otherwise, because judged inferior, of little consequence more than a convenient punching bag.

Like Guernica, destruction is intended as an object lesson, and quite possibly, as Hitler intended (though I make no reference to comparisons with Israel’s leadership—which would be a cheap and

vulgar shot), a means of forcing a political-ideological realignment of world politics to ensure Israel's global security. And like *Guernica*, we already see—with more threatened and promised—mass civilian casualties and a sea of rubble. BBC on July 14, despite its clear bias (Neo-Cons from Washington think tanks being its “experts” on most occasions) surprisingly had footage from the largest hospital in Gaza City, a physician deploring the low medical supplies, children under five wounded, fighting for their lives, personnel on round-the-clock duty, suffering, overcrowding, the sound of pain, as only happens with the impersonal destruction of human life, and beyond the hospital, the very rubble described in *Guernica* and countless other places under siege of aerial and/or missile bombardment and strikes. The Times at one point had a photograph above the article showing Israeli gunboat firing on a Gaza beach. Four children were killed in that or a similar shelling.

Where *Guernica* and Gaza differ in the annals of warfare (and I speak only of today, for tomorrow may well bring a full-scale ground assault) is that in the former German bombers came without warning, while now, at this moment, we see what might be considered an equally malicious, dangerous assault on the human spirit (“100,000 Gazans Told to Flee”), the warning, disguised—disgustedly—as altruism, ordering people to flee, where, how, by donkey, with large families, scant food supplies, so that their homes can be obliterated at the whim of the Occupier! And practically no opposition left in Israel, no sadness, no remorse for the children lying in that Gaza hospital room—all muscle-flexing, all prideful as skilled practitioners in the arts of terror.

I am reminded of Emerson's aphorism, “The ocean is a large drop; the drop is a small ocean,” not only because he recognized the relation between the universal and the particular, or, for our purpose, that between context and specific development (the Israeli treatment of Gaza, today, in the works because of decades of occupation and forcible suppression), but also because that drop (Gaza) reveals to us an ocean itself of blood, humiliation, for many, hopelessness. *Guernica* for the moment confirmed to the oppressor the impunity with which aggression could be pulled off, precisely, again for the moment (it is hoped, not longer), Israel's aggression toward Gaza reveals the same sense of impunity, dependent on the US watching its back, preventing the international community from acting, and that community's own listlessness in acting against aggression (without prior American approval).

What of the first part, “the ocean is a large drop”—in reality, the global context itself, for here Israel is shooting craps with the lives of its captives, raising the risk of a wider conflagration, Gaza merely a chip in the game of power politics, in which Israel's role becomes magnified out of all proportion to its size and, save for its nuclear arsenal, strength. It is too simple to say, Israel has become, and has been for some time, an extension of American imperialism, words that come readily to hand, but, less simplistic, perhaps, one finds that it furnishes an ideological example, or even beachhead, for extending American security and influence, widening the scope of permissibility for aggression (read: intervention, regime change, forcible commercial-financial penetration) on a world scale, yet particularly applicable to the oil-rich Middle East and beyond, the Arab-Muslim world. And qua ideological example, it helps to integrate militarism with capitalism as a world system, counterrevolutionary in nature, i.e., freed from the challenges of national liberation struggles, socialism, and even capitalism of a more regulative character.

It's nice to have friends when one is determined on maintaining unilateral global hegemony, necessarily at the social cost of growing impoverishment for much of the rest of the world. America

is running short of having such friends, particularly ones strategically placed in the fulfillment of multiple goals, from oil-security to regional stabilization (taking in the Balkans and North Africa) to political expedience at home, in which support for Israel is code for conservatism in general, the approval of evangelical Protestantism in particular, and, as with the popularity in policy circles of Neo-Cons (transcending party affiliation), the sanctioning of war, armaments, defense budgets, the martial spirit, all conducive to the formation of the National Security State and what I have termed the militarization of capitalism. Israel, of course, doesn't have to assume the burden of protecting and preserving America's transformation into a fully-matured corporatism it is striving to become. Liberalism is already doing a good job of that. But having a help- mate that shares the same outlook on cheapening the lives of those it exercises power over, whether at home or abroad, and sharing so many other key beliefs, values, and practices, from extolling militarism to encasing the social system in a framework of arrogance, is not to be gainsaid. Following through on Emerson, one might say that Israel is a microcosm of America, a dot in the ocean of counterrevolution.

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Briefly, the article cited above—Rudoren in Jerusalem, Barnard in Gaza—has some excellent material, in spite of my demur about its heading and implied possible Israeli sympathies. Hamas is usually coupled with the term “militant,” and its rejection of the Egyptian cease-fire proposal incorrectly presented as “with no explanation.” Yet it refers to “Israel’s bomb warnings to Gazans, distributed by leaflets, automated calls and text messages,” demanding mass evacuation, and quotes the IDF leaflet, “Whoever disregards these instructions and fails to evacuate immediately endangers their own lives, as well as those of their families,”—a blood-curdling message (one can almost hear the loud speakers and sound trucks in Prague or Paris, Second World War-vintage). Damage was extensive from the bombings which had already taken place, e.g., “a new, five-story headquarters of the Interior Ministry was reduced to rubble,” and “strikes had also hit the homes of,” followed by a list of officials, and then this: “The Palestinian death toll passed 201 on Wednesday...after a strike on a car in the southern town of Khan Younis killed three people. At least eight people were killed overnight, among them a 5 year-year-old girl who fell from a high spot.” Then, the four children on the beach—[t]here was no immediate comment from the Israel Defense Forces.”

The reporters quote a Lieberman statement (see below, my Comment) and his follow-up, total in his solution: “We need to ensure that all Hamas terrorists run away, are imprisoned or will die.” No order of preference is mentioned. The scene itself is designedly one of chaos, people not knowing where to turn: “In the densely populated and poor neighborhoods of Zeitoun and Shejaya in Gaza City, many people appear confused, with some seeking shelter in friends’ homes deeper inside the neighborhoods rather than leaving.” This example speaks volumes about the terror tactics involved (Hamas called the warnings “psychological warfare”): “‘We don’t know where we’re going, we’re going aimlessly,’ said Mohammed Dalul, who was driving a donkey cart with six children and an elderly neighbor. They carried only a canister of cooking gas and a single bag of clothes for the children. ‘Nobody is looking after us,’ said the neighbor, Naziha Rukhneh.” [Perhaps odd names to us, yet fellow human beings, and to Israelis, low, vile, worthless, in a word, scum, to be trampled on—mine, not that of the reporters.]

The Human Rights Watch report issued today (7/16) stated that as of the 14th, “more than three-quarters of the Palestinians killed were civilians, including 36 children, and that approximately 7,500 people had been displaced by the destruction of 1,255 homes.” The project director stated,

“Israel’s rhetoric is all about precision attacks, but attacks with no military target and many civilian deaths can hardly be considered precise.” The report took exception to “Israel’s warning residents to evacuate, saying it ‘does not make an otherwise unlawful attack lawful.’”

My New York Times Comment on the Rudoren-Barnard article, same date, follows:

“To the best of my understanding, it is not possible to ensure summer vacation, a normal summer for our kids without a ground operation in Gaza.”—Avigdor Lieberman, Israeli foreign minister.

Whether gallows humor, condescending sarcasm, or moral depravity, his statement summarizes Israeli callousness and cynicism: wipe out a people; exterminate. The idea of forcing a mass evacuation from their homes on threat of death is revisiting the mindset of Naziism. As a Jew I ask, what has happened to my people, my religion, its ethical teachings, its history of engagement in progressive causes, whether civil rights, labor unionism, antiwar, the nuts-and-bolts of American democracy in action which, absent Jewish participation, is no longer the same, and for the American Jewish community has become a transmogrification of original, indeed primal, HUMANENESS into mass population removal, wholesale bombing of defenseless populations, and now, a center for the disabled?

Lieberman, Netanyahu, etc., what summer vacations do you think Palestinian children look forward to, what “normal summer” when they, their mothers, their fathers are facing death, destruction, loss of home, inadequate medical supplies, blockade? Except in America, Israel will be known in the world as a Society of Butchers, steeped so deeply in militarism as no longer even able to envision, much less act on, MORAL CHOICE.

Mass evacuation, so their homes can be destroyed, equals ethnic cleansing.

JULY 18, 2014

### **Israel and the Psychological Dynamics of Totalitarianism**

Silence, in the face of extreme moral provocation, is not golden; it is cowardice, in this case, for a Jewish person deeply respectful of Judaism for its ethical principles and writings, its “home” to much of modern radicalism and social protest across religious, racial, ethnic lines in struggles on behalf of all humankind, the seat of devotion for his parents, to be silent NOW, is to be complicit in the degradation of one’s faith as Israel taking the name of the Jewish State and claiming to represent world Jewry commits wanton war crimes and atrocities—and has for some time—on a helpless, desperate, defenseless people who have been under the Iron Heel of occupation for decades. Palestinians face subjugation on a daily basis; I, and my fellow Jews, face the long-term desecration of our faith and, ultimately, separation from God. For what purpose? To what end?

We all know the drill. Dare to criticize Israel on any ground, much less the militarization of its political culture and mindset, and consequent actions and displays of power, employing superior force for the purposes of intimidation (here, Palestinians, but also, dissident Israelis themselves), and one is labeled immediately a “self-hating” Jew, as though a full-scale propaganda apparatus following closely Jewish opinion and currents of thought were ready to pounce. An addiction to conspiracy theory on my part? No, whether highly organized or intuitively expressed by a large proportion of the Jewish community, especially in America, the charge comes quickly and doesn’t

miss a trick: ostracism, isolation, for those presumably misguided/dishonored/ungrateful individuals who dare speak up but also invoked even on a whole range of issues, unrelated to Israel, but again organized and/or intuitively felt as questioning what has become an integrated world-view. If one questions American foreign policy, or recognizes Putin has a leg to stand on in his analysis of and response to the Ukraine crisis, one is therefore a self-hating Jew.

The rigidity of mind is revealed through its inner consistency where human rights are concerned (not Neo-Con “human rights,” liberal humanitarianism achieved through war, intervention, regime change, at the point of a gun), but as authentically realized by peoples often through social struggle, that which must necessarily be suppressed as a principle of national policy and statecraft lest world politics become democratized and freed from local, regional, and global pressures of domination. In its own right and as cheering section for Global Reaction, Israel has proven its mettle, not least in furthering US international objectives. But here I veer too much to the theoretical; meanwhile, the people of Gaza are writhing in pain—and the world does not care.

World Jewry, led by the US, in its ironclad embrace of Israel, is in process of constructing psychological walls of self-denial, a massive collective defense mechanism, prepared to tolerate anything in the name of what is perhaps an historically twisted version of Zionism (emphasizing those passages of Torah which glorify the chosen-people doctrine and legitimate the conquest of others, while ignoring the beauty and majesty of the universality embodied in the Decalogue), clearly fearful of the cosmopolitan, humane, yes, radical in many cases, and for even the poorest unskilled worker or farmer, a respect for learning and inclination toward the intellectual as part of daily life and Jewish identity—all being swept away presently by the vulgarization of extolling Repression and methodically practicing—perhaps to confirm one’s superiority—the suppression and humiliation of Palestinians. Do the cries of Gazan mothers holding their dead children not move Israelis? Apparently not, for otherwise this carpet-bombing-in-microcosm would never be considered.

We speak of “self-hating” Jews. It’s time to throw the ball back into the court of the Jewish militaristic, Super-Mensch of Israel and their complicit, frightened, subservient admirers in America. It’s time to cast off the epithet used to silence dissent among Jews themselves, and move from “self-hating” to what had always been “self-affirming” and “life-affirming” Jews, which also translates as, a time for self-respecting Jews in Israel to leave Israel, our contemporary Sodom, in every respect a denigration of Judaism itself. As I write, the juggernaut of Israeli might is on the move. From Jodi Rudoren and Fares Akram’s New York Times article, “Netanyahu Warns of Wider Israel Operation in Gaza,” (July 18), we see illustration of the ruthless push, even the photo of a family walking, father, mother, children, grandmother, down the road, meager possessions—a small bag in the father’s right hand is all, his other, clutching that of one of his children, a desolate scene, massive Israeli tanks reported to be hovering out of sight.

Thus: “Al Aksa radio station, which is run by Hamas [as if perhaps to discount the veracity, or a knee-jerk NYT instruction to its reporters to slur for its own sake], reported that three children of Ismail Abu Musalem—Walaa, 12, Mohammed, 13, and Ahmed, 14—had been killed when a shell hit their bedroom in Al Nada housing bloc, close to the Erez crossing from Israel.” So much for surgical strikes, so much for avoiding civilian casualties (“housing bloc”). Thus, too (here I apologize to the reporters; they are doing a conscientious job): “Dozens of families fled intense Israeli bombings in northern Gaza on foot and on donkey carts packed with up to 10 people,

including children and older adults.” They continue: “Explosions from airstrikes could be seen, as well as outgoing rockets or mortars. Little else moved in Gaza City, where streets were mostly deserted and shops were closed.” This is not an incursion—a mere raid—but a full-scale assault: “An exception [to the quiet] was Shifa Hospital, where casualties continued to arrive, including one body blown to pieces and a boy whose face was pockmarked by shrapnel. Many staff members at the hospital have worked nearly nonstop for 11 days. A funeral was held nearby for two others killed overnight.”

In northern Gaza, “it was relatively calm at midday [Friday] after a night of shelling and machine-gun fire.” The palpable sense of terror: Residents “thought Israel [using tanks] might be clearing the way for further incursions [that word!] later.” And “in the town of Khan Younis in southern Gaza, at least nine people were killed overnight, including four members of the Radwan family,” as meanwhile, residents in the eastern part of the town said “bulldozers were leveling fields planted with crops near the border fence in eastern Gaza in what is known as the ‘buffer zone’—a strip where Israel prevented planting for years but lifted restrictions under a cease-fire agreement that ended the last Gaza battle in 2012” (this last an example, restrictions on planting, of the day-to-day humiliation intended by the occupation).

Too, air strikes by F-16s and Apache helicopters targeting “an apartment in Al Jawhara tower,” as, a mile inside Israeli territory, “dozens of tanks topped with Israeli flags were parked in fields, with soldiers on standby... The Israeli military has begun calling up 18,000 more reservists, adding to the 50,000 already mobilized for the campaign.” This all, in less than the first twenty-four hours, to which our estimable Secretary of State, John Kerry, urged precision and, according to the department, “the need to avoid further escalation.” For the record, the UN “estimates that three-quarters of the Palestinians killed in the operation were not militants and that the victims include MORE THAN 50 CHILDREN” (my caps). In addition to the four children killed on the beachfront in Gaza City, four more “were killed in an airstrike as they played on a Gaza City rooftop at around 6 p.m. on Thursday,” i.e., the start of the operation.

Let’s give the final word to Netanyahu, that he might metaphorically hang himself. This today (the 18th): Israel’s is “a moral army like no other... [and] does not aspire to hurt even one innocent person, not even one.” When I speak of the psychological dynamics of totalitarianism, I mean that wall of denial, which in turn masks a profoundly deep guilt for the inhumanity not allowed self-recognition (or in this case, the nation’s), but for that reason there and taking aggressive outlet. Israelis are everything the Palestinians are not, and must shatter the mirror which holds them up to themselves so as not to see what they have become: incapable of feeling, unable to respond to the tears of the mothers and fathers (they, too, not ashamed to cry) over the death or maiming of their child; seeing that living simply is a refutation of the Israeli hedonistic-sybaritic lifestyle, and its gated-communities a stark contrast to the overcrowded norm of conditions and ascetic manner of a people going about their daily life. Youths have been killed waiting to attend morning prayers, and in Jerusalem itself the Israel Home Front Command has barred men under 50 from Al Aksa Mosque compound for Friday prayers, even though this is the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Psychological totalitarianism: nothing must be permitted to penetrate the tightly-locked worldview of dominance, license to conquer, arrogance, certitude, for any glimmer of doubt might shatter the whole mental-cultural-ideological edifice and the corrupted institutional framework on

which it rests. And then, just perhaps, Judaism can rediscover its roots in the struggle for human betterment of all peoples in the world. Shalom.

JULY 23, 2014

### **Modern Judaism's Proscriptive Nature**

Among Jews today, Israel is an end in itself, the demand for uniformity of acceptance, synchronized with acts of invasion, now deafening. Thirteen days into the present military attack, onslaught, really, given an intensified war setting featuring bombings, missiles, artillery, ground troops, large civilian casualties, neighborhoods in flames, all intended to kill, maim, terrorize, the last even adopting the techniques of psychological warfare (leaflets from the air, ordering evacuation), have wiped away all pretence tunnels and rockets are the cause of Israel's assault on the Gazan people. Hospitals become morgues, an ambulance is fired on, GRIEF found everywhere—rampant institutionalized sadism having little to do with Israelis' nominal objectives, else why the deliberate civilian carnage?

Let's go back a day or two, to the New York Times account of Anne Barnard and Jodi Rudoren, "Despite Israeli Push in Gaza, Hamas Fighters Slip Through Tunnels," (July 19), [the original title of the article, "9 Members of a Family Are Buried in Gaza," same date]. Already, despite The Times's evident sympathies, perhaps only partially shared by these reporters, favoring Israel, we read: "Though the government has said the ground campaign will be limited and focused on the tunnels, the growing intensity of the battles that are pushing deeper into civilian areas suggested that the impact on Gaza's civilians could grow far worse."

One does not have to be a soothsayer to make that prediction; the 46 dead that day was only a preview of or down payment on the carnage to follow the next day. Even for the 19th, they write: "Already tens of thousands of Gazans have been forced to flee. The day's death toll appeared to be the highest since July 8, when Israel began airstrikes it said were meant to quell rocket attacks." Yes, but—not rocketers, but plain civilians are being targeted. Thus: "At one hospital in northern Gaza, the director said that 40 casualties arrived in just four hours Saturday morning.... The Palestinian death toll in Gaza rose to 336, with more than 2,400 wounded" [the UN estimating 75% of the casualties being civilians]. This is not a numbers game; in the next 24-36 hours, The Times constantly revised the Palestinian death toll upward with each bulletin from the front.

And as earlier in the campaign, the Israelis, reminiscent, as I pointed out in a previous article, of the loudspeakers and sound trucks of the Nazis, "dropped leaflets urging residents of additional areas, including two crowded refugee camps, Al-Bureij and Al-Maghazi, to evacuate, raising alarms from the United Nations, which said that shelters were already overwhelmed and in danger of running out of supplies." From news reports and television footage, one sees fear, panic, bewilderment, parents clutching children, moving en masse yet directionless, because knowing Israeli aircraft and artillery are no respecter of anything that moves—as, days before, the four children playing on the beach in Gaza City, and the four playing on a rooftop. The reporters, again: "More than 63,000 people have flocked to official shelters, a number that has tripled in two days, and many more have taken refuge with friends and family."



The message: Evacuate, while we blow up your homes; don't evacuate, yourselves as well. Yes, the Abu Jarad family, first nine reported killed when an "Israeli artillery barrage Friday night" hit their apartment, then eight, "including four children,"—as meanwhile, "in northern Gaza, scores were buried. In Khan Younis to the south, seven people were killed, mostly men, and others were wounded when a drone struck a group of people in the middle of the city, the health ministry said." For the nth time, I say, so much for surgical strikes (unless accuracy in the service of premeditated murder), because targets are chosen for their terror-potential or left random to the same end.

My New York Times Comment on the Barnard-Rudoren article, same date, follows:

The Abu Jarad family serves as refutation of Israeli claims, voiced yesterday by Netanyahu, of having the most moral army in the world. What is truly sickening is the way Jewish people who criticize Israeli military actions are knee-jerk charged as "self-hating" Jews, a charge that reveals how far Israelis and the American Jewish community have sunk in their blind apology of Israel's war crimes.

I am a Jew, proud of my heritage, proud of the Decalogue as a majestic contribution to the world's moral-ethical teachings, proud of the role Jews have played in modern times in literature and the arts, proud, perhaps most of all, in the way American Jews until about 1970 have been in the vanguard of radical and liberal causes in America, a universality of brotherhood and dedication to civil liberties.

What now? Inability to see the murder, yes, murder, committed against Palestinians, too, complicity with reactionary governments worldwide. And of course NYT posters, on cue, come back: Norman, you anti-Semitic Jew, etc.

Cynicism, callousness, underlying guilt are all eating away at a world religion I loved dearly for its genuine regard for all people. Now, only HATE, viciousness, fear of exposure as moral monsters—so be it. Cling to your illusions. Bask in victimhood, anything but face the truth, the truth that Jews have become the oppressor, not the oppressed, cruel, unfeeling, a total negation of the sublime beauty of Judaism in the past based on humanism and humaneness.

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The following day, Sunday (July 20), was no better, here Barnard and Isabel Kershner's, "Israeli Attack in Gaza City Said to Kill at Least 60 Palestinians," specifically, "in Shejaiya, a neighborhood in eastern Gaza City," reports that "[f]or the Palestinians, it was the deadliest episode since July 8, when Israel began its offensive," and continues: "The Gaza Health Ministry reported that more than 300 people were injured in Shejaiya. Tolls were not available from the refugee camps in central Gaza, where fleeing residents reported a similar Israeli advance, with artillery." (I would add, refugee camps seem to be a particularly compelling target for Israel, as in Ariel Sharon's attack on one in Lebanon several years back.) The Palestinian government, which includes the Authority and Hamas, called the Shejaiya killings "a heinous massacre," Israelis claiming justification because a tunnel network facilitating militants' incursions into Israel had to be stopped. Therefore, the now, as borne out by the previous record, accustomed overkill, "at least 403 Palestinians, many of them civilians...killed," along with "about 2,600...wounded during Israel's 13-day air and ground offensive, according to Reuters." Tellingly, "The director of Shifa Hospital

said [of the 60] 17 children, 14 women and four older persons were among the dead from Shejaiya.” All, one surmises, were presumably terrorists crawling through the tunnels, ready to strike?

Shejaiya, Israel’s Guernica, and for the same reason, to terrorize a population into submission, comes into view: “At the edge of Shejaiya, dark smoke rose above buildings on Sunday [The Times’s front-page photograph confirms this] and shelling cracked and thumped nearby with hardly a second’s pause between rounds. Shops were closed, and clusters of people periodically emerged from the narrower streets of the neighborhood and rushed up the hill toward downtown.” A “heinous massacre”? For example: “A chain of five children holding hands trotted uphill, dragged by an adult—the smallest boy, around 3, with an expression of confusion and terror. Barefoot, he clutched his flip-flops in his hand.” Vans with five on the roof, “the inside packed with people and mattresses.” To continue: “Some people sat down as soon as they got out of immediate danger.... Asked where she would go, one woman sitting on a stoop with a half-dozen children said, ‘God knows.’”

And this: “At Shifa Hospital, a girl who looked about 9 was brought into the emergency room and laid on a gurney, blood soaking the shoulder of her shirt. Motionless and barely alive, she stared at the ceiling, her mouth open. There was no relative with her to give her name. The medical staff stood quietly around her.” Israelis, are you listening? Can you even hear in your smugness, your superiority, your bloodless arrogance? Days before, Lieberman was concerned that Israeli children might miss summer camp because of hostilities. This child never had a chance to go: “Every now and then, they checked her vital signs, until it was time. They covered her with a white sheet, and she was gone. A few moments later, a new patient lay on the gurney.”

Tunnels, rockets—why not? After six decades of forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, humiliation at the checkpoints, OCCUPATION, one might ask, who are the terrorists, the Palestinians or the Israelis? Let Shejaiya be weighed in the scales when answer is given, Shejaiya of course being not alone. An elderly woman, helped by a woman, a lab technician, who had “brought a medical kit with her, along with her son’s diaper bag, in case anyone needed help,” after being treated when her foot was cut “on glass as she fled barefoot,” said that “her family were refugees from what is now Beersheba. They fled from there in 1948 during the war over Israel’s founding. ‘I’m afraid that this is another 1948.... God forbid. We were driven out in 1948 and WE ARE BEING DRIVEN OUT AGAIN NOW.’” (My caps.) Casualties rising, hospitals bursting at the seams, 400...when will it stop? When will the international community act in light of its professed principles?

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At the moment, seemingly the worst thing a Jewish person can do is charge Israel with war crimes, and point out its dishonoring the very religious faith it hides behind—the Jewish State—in committing them. For that opens one instantly to the charge, a “self-hating” Jew, done with exquisite and thunderous synchronicity, all propaganda and interest-group machinery participating, so as to bulldoze, intimidate, corral, bring into line any Jew who dares to think for him/herself, the process, while continuous, to avoid dissent at all costs, nevertheless peaks at moments such as this: the escalation to enforce conformity when Israel is on the march. Long-term historical explanations are not wanted; only the tunnels and elementary rockets count. No one dares ask, what if Zionist settlers from day one had been solicitous of the welfare of those who already inhabited the land,

rather than treating them as wholly dehumanized and fair game to be forcibly removed? I will reserve for another time my thoughts on the “self-hating” Jew, and throw back in the face of those who claim to speak authoritatively for Judaism that rather, it is they who are self-hating, whether they realize it or not, because they cannot affirm the living spirit of Judaism itself, i.e., the self-affirming and life-affirming Jew we all have known so well in the period before, say, 1960, vivified in the biracial coalitions embodied in the martyred deaths of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman—none of whom would be bombing houses in Gaza.

Postscript: Rudorun, her article, “Israel Claims Destruction of 2 More Gaza Tunnels,” (July 21), is less about tunnels than carnage, with civilian casualties, this the following day, already passing the 500 mark. She writes, the scene already familiar: “In the northern town of Beit Hanoun, several thousand residents streamed toward Gaza City on foot, in donkey carts, and packed into cars.” One thinks of the desperate flight of refugees in World War 2 (absent the aid now brought in) as one reads: “The United Nations said as many as 100,000 residents were taking refuge in 67 shelters and that an airlift of aid including 45,000 mattresses and 10,000 blankets from Dubai had landed in Amman and was en route to Gaza. ‘Situation for civilians beyond imagining,’ a spokesman, Chris Gunness, said in a post on Twitter.” To underscore the point, one reads: “With the Palestinian death toll reaching 500, families gathered at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City to collect bodies for burial.”

Tunnels, surgical strikes, Netanyahu’s most humane army in the world, every effort made to prevent civilian casualties? Here the reporter adds, “At the Abu Jamei family’s home in southeast Gaza, people searching beneath the rubble left by an overnight attack Monday counted 26 bodies, by far the most victims of a single strike in this offensive.” The offensive continues. Photographs of the terrorized, the sea of children, the mass flight—to nowhere safe, tell the story.

JULY 24, 2014

### **Political Bestiality**

Let’s start with terms: “bestiality,” bestial is marked by base or inhuman instincts or desires, brutal, to which bestiality adds, display or gratification of bestial traits or impulses; “pogrom,” an organized massacre of helpless people, specifically [and ironically], such a massacre of Jewish people. (Webster’s) Singly, and in combination, I believe we have an accurate description of Israel’s aggression in Gaza, the irony of course being that we see a replay of the barbarous treatment of the Jews practiced throughout history now instead being carried forward by Jews themselves in, yes, a massacre, as brutal as in Czarist times, of Gazans.

Before proceeding further, let’s throw in another phrase, emanating from Israeli and multiple Jewish sources, the charge, to be applied to fellow Jews for any criticism whatsoever of Israel, which makes one a “self-hating” Jew. I frankly don’t know whether to accept the designation (sans quotation marks), in which case I would be expressing my abhorrence to the war crimes committed by Israel, by convention, in world Jewry, THE representative of the Jewish people and religion, leading therefore to feelings of shame, alienation, and betrayal, that my religion, ancestral heritage, upbringing, could so distort the meaning of Judaism as I’ve known and loved it, necessitating, through the dictates of conscience (itself formerly a Jewish trait shared with world secular and religious thought), that I formally leave the Jewish faith until it purges itself of urges toward domination and, also yes, sadism. Or else, retain the quotation marks around “self-hating” Jew and

come out fighting, throwing the vile epithet back in the face of those who use it to silence dissent and prevent exposure,, within the Jewish community, to recognition of what is being done in its name and to solidify its identity and devotion.

Obviously, I choose the latter, stating outright that Israel and world (especially American) Jewry blindly supporting it have contributed to the falsification, denigration, debasement of Judaism, a treacherous act of negation even Nazism with its gas chambers and concentration camps could not do, i.e., destroy the Jewish love of freedom and cosmopolitan outreach to all peoples in search of a humane, equitable social order. In fact, the phrase “self-hating” Jew is disguise, cover, defense mechanism, to hide what has become the tragic phenomenon resulting from the Holocaust. Rather than experience a burst of emancipation from that darkest of dark experiences, Jews have internalized it, introjected the behavior and values of their captors, murderers, assailants, replicating through application to others the crimes committed on themselves (ourselves, to bring it home). “Self-hating” Jew is in fact a reactive formation, possibly even a projection of what through intervening levels of the unconscious is the realization by the Jewish people of the true state of their current mindset and experience. I am speaking, then, of Jewish self-hatred, which is self-hating Jew stripped of the quotation marks, SELF-HATRED because the denial of all that made Judaism worthwhile as both a secular and religious experience in modern times—secular and religious being an almost empty distinction when one notes the unified Jewish response on behalf of the welfare of others, in America, blacks, the poor, radicals, militant labor, dissidents of every description—all washed away in the last half-century, first, gradually, then by the 1980s a growing tumult of, now the introversion of McCarthyism, of Reaction, an anticommunism of the spirit having nothing to do with communism but as code for opposition to antiwar, civil rights, whatever rocks-the-boat movements, most vociferously applied to the defense of Israel and the actions and tenets of US foreign policy.

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blames Hamas for the violence and states that Israel, presumably including the hospital shelling, is making “an ‘appropriate and legitimate effort’ to defend itself but the consequences were of deep concern.” How deep the concern, this official Washington talking out of both sides of its mouth?

We learn further, “In Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, al-Aqsa hospital became the third to be struck in the 14-day conflict when three shells slammed into the intensive care unit, surgical and administrative areas. Five people were killed and 70 wounded, including about 30 medics.... Ambulances tried to evacuate patients but were forced to turn back by continued shelling. Israel has claimed that Hamas hides weapons in hospitals.” Therefore, blow them up? More still: “Further south, in Khan Younis, an extended family was wiped out in an air strike on a house. The number of dead was put at between 24 and 28. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights said “another 10 people were killed in a single air strike in Rafah, including four young children and a baby.” And Save the Children estimates “that on average, seven had been killed every day during the conflict,” one of its spokesperson’s also reminding us, “For many children, this is the third war in six years that they are going through.” A second photo taken at a morgue is captioned, “Palestinians pray over the bodies of 17 members of the Abu Jamea family, killed by an air strike.”

Sherwood, et. al., in an article, “Israel hits hundreds of targets in Gaza as soldier is confirmed missing,” (July 22), point out that one hundred alone focused on Shejaiya, “the scene of the most intense fighting of the conflict.” In the larger picture, according to B’Tselem, the description worthy of an indictment of Israeli leadership, civil, political, military, before the International Criminal Court in the Hague: “Horrific developments in Gaza have reached intolerable heights; Israel is bombing houses with people in them, entire families have been buried under rubble, and streets lie in ruins. Hundreds have been killed so far, dozens in the last 24 hours only, many of them women and children. The number of refugees is rising: tens of thousands of people have nowhere to go and no safe haven.” 1939? No, July 22, 2014. Nor in any particular exaggerated. We have the reports, the photographs, the children’s deaths, the rubble—and the slickness of the Israeli reply.

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Anne Barnard, in her New York Times article, “Questions About Tactics and Targets as Civilian Toll Climbs in Israeli Strikes,” (July 21), enables us to fill in important details, first, about what happened in Khan Younis: “The blast from the Israeli strike was so powerful that it threw an iron door clear over several neighboring houses. It came to rest along with a twisted laundry rack still laden on Monday with singed clothes and a child’s slipper.” This, in a densely populated urban area; carnage is the only word that will do: “When the strike leveled a four-story house in the southern Gaza Strip the night before, it also killed 25 members of four family households—including 19 children—gathered to break the Ramadan fast together. Relatives said it also killed a guest of the family, identified by an Israeli human rights group as a member of the Hamas military wing, ostensibly Israel’s target.”

Enough reason for the slaughter, or do we now see McCarthyism’s guilt-by-association principle raised to near-infinity, itself testimony to a mindset verging on a totalistic concept and practice of repression. “The attack,” Barnard writes, “was the latest in a series of Israeli strikes that have killed families in their homes, during an offensive that Israel says is meant to stop militant rocket fire that targets its civilians and destroys Hamas’s tunnel network.” The explanation is self-serving and hardly connects with, except as a terror-tactic, the civilian killings on a massive scale. Barnard

appears to realize this perfectly well, whatever The Times's editorial policy: "The Palestinian deaths—75 percent of them civilians, according to a United Nations count—have prompted a wave of international outrage, and are raising questions about Israel's stated dedication to protecting civilians."

Israel's reply: All Hamas's fault, "saying they have chosen to keep operating among civilians," while the now familiar spokesman for the Israeli military, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, said "he had not been able to confirm the circumstances of the attack here or who the target might have been." Par-for-the-course stonewalling, nor would he "address questions about whether the target would have been considered worth so many additional deaths." That is of course the question Israelis would not reply to; whatever the status of past surgical strikes (were they such? were they even then justified?), now, she continues, "there have been numerous instances of family homes being struck with residents inside." Out of the mouths of babes, or even Times reporters, comes wisdom: "More and more Palestinians are accusing Israel of trying to inflict maximum suffering to demoralize Palestinians and weaken support for Hamas." The tone of her writing seems to credit the observation.

How could it be otherwise, the facts now on the table, the war crimes not simply evident but becoming self-evident? More description of carnage, and then a fact which suggests ghouliness beyond war crimes, to wit, encourage Gazans to seek safety in an area, then BOMB it: "On Monday night [the 21st], a strike hit an eight-story apartment building in downtown Gaza City—an area where Israeli officials had urged Gazans to take shelter. The building collapsed as rescue crews were inside, killing more people. The death toll, at least 13, was still being tallied.

Here one credits the Israelis for their frankness, as that of one senior military official who said that not all civilian casualties "come from strikes going astray; some take place when civilians are in places the military aims to hit." What he meant was not terrorization as such, but a contrived picture of Hamas "holding people inside the apartments while shooting from there," which comes down to the same thing (a license to kill). Barnard sees through this: "That did not appear to be the situation at the Abu Jameh home, where survivors said, the family was gathered to break the daily Ramadan fast, a ceremonial meal, a time when Israeli military officials would have known that people were likely to be home." All of the dead were from that family, except for one Hamas member "who was visiting a member of the family." Enough, no more for now. The picture is clear: "Of those who lived in the house, only four people survived, three men who had gone to pray, and Tawfik Abu Jameh's toddler, shielded by the body of his mother. The children killed ranged in age from 4 months to 14 years, and included an adopted orphan whose father had been killed in an Israeli strike."

"Self-hating" Jew, no, Jewish self-hatred, for the acts committed in the name of Judaism, and for the negation of the acts which had once distinguished Judaism as the vehicle and spirit of world humanism, peace, social justice, racial harmony, and individual self-creation and self-development, all the fruition of the struggle for freedom.



JULY 24, 2014

## **The Israeli Pogrom of Gaza**

Let's start with terms: "bestiality," bestial is marked by base or inhuman instincts or desires, brutal, to which bestiality adds, display or gratification of bestial traits or impulses; "pogrom," an organized massacre of helpless people, specifically [and ironically], such a massacre of Jewish people. (Webster's) Singly, and in combination, I believe we have an accurate description of Israel's aggression in Gaza, the irony of course being that we see a replay of the barbarous treatment of the Jews practiced throughout history now instead being carried forward by Jews themselves in, yes, a massacre, as brutal as in Czarist times, of Gazans.

Before proceeding further, let's throw in another phrase, emanating from Israeli and multiple Jewish sources, the charge, to be applied to fellow Jews for any criticism whatsoever of Israel, which makes one a "self-hating" Jew. I frankly don't know whether to accept the designation (sans quotation marks), in which case I would be expressing my abhorrence to the war crimes committed by Israel, by convention, in world Jewry, THE representative of the Jewish people and religion, leading therefore to feelings of shame, alienation, and betrayal, that my religion, ancestral heritage, upbringing, could so distort the meaning of Judaism as I've known and loved it, necessitating, through the dictates of conscience (itself formerly a Jewish trait shared with world secular and religious thought), that I formally leave the Jewish faith until it purges itself of urges toward domination and, also yes, sadism. Or else, retain the quotation marks around "self-hating" Jew and come out fighting, throwing the vile epithet back in the face of those who use it to silence dissent and prevent exposure, within the Jewish community, to recognition of what is being done in its name and to solidify its identity and devotion.

Obviously, I choose the latter, stating outright that Israel and world (especially American) Jewry blindly supporting it have contributed to the falsification, denigration, debasement of Judaism, a treacherous act of negation even Nazism with its gas chambers and concentration camps could not do, i.e., destroy the Jewish love of freedom and cosmopolitan outreach to all peoples in search of a humane, equitable social order. In fact, the phrase "self-hating" Jew is disguise, cover, defense mechanism, to hide what has become the tragic phenomenon resulting from the Holocaust. Rather than experience a burst of emancipation from that darkest of dark experiences, Jews have internalized it, introjected the behavior and values of their captors, murderers, assailants, replicating through application to others the crimes committed on themselves (ourselves, to bring it home). "Self-hating" Jew is in fact a reactive formation, possibly even a projection of what through intervening levels of the unconscious is the realization by the Jewish people of the true state of their current mindset and experience. I am speaking, then, of Jewish self-hatred, which is self-hating Jew stripped of the quotation marks, SELF-HATRED because the denial of all that made Judaism worthwhile as both a secular and religious experience in modern times—secular and religious being an almost empty distinction when one notes the unified Jewish response on behalf of the welfare of others, in America, blacks, the poor, radicals, militant labor, dissidents of every description—all washed away in the last half-century, first, gradually, then by the 1980s a growing tumult of, now the introversion of McCarthyism, of Reaction, an anticommunism of the spirit having nothing to do with communism but as code for opposition to antiwar, civil rights, whatever rocks-the-boat movements, most vociferously applied to the defense of Israel and the actions and tenets of US foreign policy.

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Anne Barnard, in her New York Times article, “Questions About Tactics and Targets as Civilian Toll Climbs in Israeli Strikes,” (July 21), enables us to fill in important details, first, about what happened in Khan Younis: “The blast from the Israeli strike was so powerful that it threw an iron door clear over several neighboring houses. It came to rest along with a twisted laundry rack still laden on Monday with singed clothes and a child’s slipper.” This, in a densely populated urban area; carnage is the only word that will do: “When the strike leveled a four-story house in the southern Gaza Strip the night before, it also killed 25 members of four family households—including 19 children—gathered to break the Ramadan fast together. Relatives said it also killed a guest of the family, identified by an Israeli human rights group as a member of the Hamas military wing, ostensibly Israel’s target.”

Enough reason for the slaughter, or do we now see McCarthyism’s guilt-by-association principle raised to near-infinity, itself testimony to a mindset verging on a totalistic concept and practice of repression. “The attack,” Barnard writes, “was the latest in a series of Israeli strikes that have killed families in their homes, during an offensive that Israel says is meant to stop militant rocket fire that targets its civilians and destroys Hamas’s tunnel network.” The explanation is self-serving and hardly connects with, except as a terror-tactic, the civilian killings on a massive scale. Barnard appears to realize this perfectly well, whatever The Times’s editorial policy: “The Palestinian deaths—75 percent of them civilians, according to a United Nations count—have prompted a wave of international outrage, and are raising questions about Israel’s stated dedication to protecting civilians.”

Israel’s reply: All Hamas’s fault, “saying they have chosen to keep operating among civilians,” while the now familiar spokesman for the Israeli military, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, said “he had not been able to confirm the circumstances of the attack here or who the target might have been.” Par-for-the-course stonewalling, nor would he “address questions about whether the target would have been considered worth so many additional deaths.” That is of course the question Israelis would not reply to; whatever the status of past surgical strikes (were they such? were they even then justified?), now, she continues, “there have been numerous instances of family homes being struck with residents inside.” Out of the mouths of babes, or even Times reporters, comes wisdom: “More and more Palestinians are accusing Israel of trying to inflict maximum suffering to demoralize Palestinians and weaken support for Hamas.” The tone of her writing seems to credit the observation.

How could it be otherwise, the facts now on the table, the war crimes not simply evident but becoming self-evident? More description of carnage, and then a fact which suggests ghoulishness beyond war crimes, to wit, encourage Gazans to seek safety in an area, then BOMB it: “On Monday night [the 21st], a strike hit an eight-story apartment building in downtown Gaza City—an area where Israeli officials had urged Gazans to take shelter. The building collapsed as rescue crews were inside, killing more people. The death toll, at least 13, was still being tallied.

Here one credits the Israelis for their frankness, as that of one senior military official who said that not all civilian casualties “come from strikes going astray; some take place when civilians are

in places the military aims to hit.” What he meant was not terrorization as such, but a contrived picture of Hamas “holding people inside the apartments while shooting from there,” which comes down to the same thing (a license to kill). Barnard sees through this: “That did not appear to be the situation at the Abu Jameh home, where survivors said, the family was gathered to break the daily Ramadan fast, a ceremonial meal, a time when Israeli military officials would have known that people were likely to be home.” All of the dead were from that family, except for one Hamas member “who was visiting a member of the family.” Enough, no more for now. The picture is clear: “Of those who lived in the house, only four people survived, three men who had gone to pray, and Tawfik Abu Jameh’s toddler, shielded by the body of his mother. The children killed ranged in age from 4 months to 14 years, and included an adopted orphan whose father had been killed in an Israeli strike.”

“Self-hating” Jew, no, Jewish self-hatred, for the acts committed in the name of Judaism, and for the negation of the acts which had once distinguished Judaism as the vehicle and spirit of world humanism, peace, social justice, racial harmony, and individual self-creation and self-development, all the fruition of the struggle for freedom.

JULY 28, 2014

### **Gaza’s Children Trapped in Despair**

The Gazan death toll has climbed above 1,100, no end in sight. Hamas is demonized for rejecting the cease-fire extension, mention of its one-sided character—Israeli troops remain in place, as are the full parameters of the Occupation, notably, the long-term, dispiriting, life-destroying (literally) blockade—being conveniently omitted from media coverage. Despite world concern, Palestinians are in more desperate straits than ever. Beit Hanoun was three days ago; who knows how much further punishment awaits the people of Gaza, and with demonstrations increasing, the West Bank, too? That a cease-fire is meaningless with Israeli tanks and military forces on the ground, a principal Hamas argument, implying that nothing has altered the status quo, that the carnage would be, if it has not already been, swept under the rug, and that Palestinians are no closer to a two-state solution than before, now with Israelis acting with impunity and their hard-line rigidifying, perhaps more distant than ever, all international efforts, led by Kerry, are a solemn farce. The world community has become desensitized to the plight of the weak. Israel will never suffer the consequences of its micro-genocide in Gaza, Beit Hanoun fact and symbol for the systematic killing of another people, nor suffer the pangs of conscience, fact and symbol for its own inner moral decay.

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World Jewry has erected a high wall of ideological protection around Israel, a defensive-psychological formation which not only condones its actions in all particulars (including, now, the invasion of Gaza), but also vituperatively strikes out, the cancer of intra-recriminatory behavior, against critics as therefore self-hating Jews for purposes of silencing dissent. Judaism is presently in a strait-jacket, the prime enabler for Israel’s commission of war crimes. I have consistently argued for the separation of Judaism from Israel, the latter a transgressive force contaminating the wellsprings of Jewish ethical principles and teachings by its actions with respect to Palestinians and, in fact, a global posture of Reaction, as in its uncritical support of—fully reciprocated by—

American foreign policy. Even when not directly joined in battle, Israel has been the spiritual (I use the term loosely) partner of America in counterterrorism as it melds with the power politics of counterrevolution, presently directed at Iran, China, Russia, and going back to US wars of global hegemony, from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, not to say, from the 1950s on, the overthrow of democratically-elected governments, again Iran, and later Chile, for starters.

This inseparable record helps explain the US support for Israel, a coded relationship signifying a common purpose, beyond presumed religious bridges of orthodoxy/fundamentalism spanning both sides, or the propaganda activities and lobbying of AIPAC, that reaches to the heart of a mutually favored system of globalization free alike from socialism, revolution, and challenges, political, economic, cultural, military, to a nucleus of Western powers led, naturally, by the US. There would be no slaughter of innocents in Gaza without that global framework intact, or rather, in process of being worked out. How relate this to Beit Hanoun? Gazans and Palestinians in general, representing the oppressed worldwide, are a test case in the necessary circumvention of freedom, if power-relations of dominance and submission are secured and made permanent. The world is shaking down into its constituents, for the US and Israel an alarming rise of rival power blocs and indigenous peoples, industrialization and broad patterns of modernization now on the historical boards and readily within reach, so that the accustomed status of superiority in a selectively defined West, backed by military force, is being questioned if not yet undermined.

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Before turning to Beit Hanoun, I must contest the idea of the self-hating Jew because an impediment to clear thinking on the inflammatory subterfuge which seeks to exonerate Israel from its aggressions now and before, and because it also seeks a false solidification of the Jewish people through scare-tactics of supposed disloyalty and worse. Criticism of Israel does not signify anti-Semitism. Period. The charge of self-hating Jew is intended to terrorize Jews into conformity while not-so-subtly giving sanction to Torah interpretations, admittedly present, which emphasize passages celebrating conquest, the chosen-people idea, and divine mission (the Promise of the Land). My position, however, is that Judaism is more than the embodiment of ethnocentrism. From its secular and religious dimensions, often combined through an irreducible identity founded on historical experience and social teachings, we see in the nineteenth and twentieth century, until, I suspect, the 1970s, an inspirational surge of radicalism and intellectual creativity central to US and global progressive currents, from philosophy, literature, and painting, to the organization of unions, civil rights demonstrations, and the antiwar movement, earning, particularly in the period 1890-1940, the respect for American radicalism enjoyed on a world basis.

Jewish neuroticism (a not altogether deplorable trait, because, Hamlet-like, it often can lead to fleshing out submerged issues) is not of interest here, except insofar as the “self-hating” imagery disguises from Israelis the layers of repression corroding the Jewish conscience through showing indifference to the suffering Israel has inflicted on the Palestinian people. American Jewry, ditto. Making the charge itself betrays the characteristics of a blood-feud, in which Israel is fast destroying Judaism. I cannot let that happen, despite CounterPunchers who have e-mailed me saying, in effect, I should throw the baby out with the bathwater. Judaism, perhaps all religion, is not worth saving. I’m not prepared to go that far. One cannot blame Judaism for Israel’s conduct. Israel has brought Judaism’s identity into question, an issue beyond secular vs. religious, or, for the latter, between various intra-denominational shadings or belief systems. As religion it stands in

danger of transmutation because of unyielding attachment and devotion to its nationalistic expression, presumed to have the status of universality, which, were it any other nation, would have earned the condemnation for its policies and actions by a pre-Israel world Jewry and, especially, Jewish community in America.

If I tend to romanticize and/or exaggerate Jewish radicalism, humaneness, socially transcendent visions of racial equalitarianism and economic democratization, foundation stones for emancipated thinking in literature, music, philosophy, and the arts, signifying a vanguard group for progressive civilization, this is bred in my bones, in my civil-rights and antiwar protests, in spiritual affirmations of human betterment, whether or not I was a believer, an agnostic, or an atheist. Judaism was historically the umbrella under which like-minded radicals/humanists gathered—of course not the only one, but worthy of respect and, through my criticism of Israel and the American Jewish community in lockstep with it, my pointed effort toward its liberation from what I consider its present state of global Reaction and moral emptiness. The charge of self-hating Jew is framed by guilt that Judaism as currently practiced can no longer affirm its past. Enough for now; I shall return to the topic later in greater depth. The deeply-moving tragedy of Beit Hanoun awaits discussion.

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It is easy, and usually valid, to berate the New York Times in its editorial policy, the preponderance of its op-ed contributors, and much but not all of its journalism, i.e., first-rate work of investigative reporters in the field (at times, below the radar of the editorial board). In this series of articles on Israel's invasion of Gaza (now the sixth) I have drawn heavily on, and learned much from, The Times by way of concrete facts of Israeli criminality, from saturated bombing to the missile firings of armored vehicles, on to the use of ground troops (together a scorched-earth policy in microcosm within a densely populated civilian area). Most recent, we see Ben Hubbard and Isabel Kershner's article, "In Gaza, at Least 16 Die at U.N. School Used as Civilian Shelter," (July 24), and Hubbard and Jodi Rudoren's, "Blasts Kill 16 Seeking Haven at Gaza School," (July 25), a composite picture leaving no doubt as to Israeli disregard of world opinion and insensitivity to mass killings (then weaseling out by claiming Hamas rockets may have fallen short, this despite the fact that four U.N. schools have been hit thus far by Israeli shelling).

Hubbard-Kershner in an opening statement sets the scene: "A series of explosions at a school run by the United Nations sheltering hundreds of Palestinians who had fled their homes for safety from Israeli missile assaults killed at least 16 people on Thursday afternoon [the 24th] and wounded many more. The cause was not immediately clear." Colorless, yet fraught with meaning: Israeli tanks rummaging through neighborhoods, firing at will, supported by air strikes and troops; medical teams unable to rescue the wounded because fired on by snipers; medical supplies running out in overcrowded hospitals, themselves subject to bombardment; multiple hits, on a school thought to be a safe haven, but how many errant shots could Hamas possibly have launched so coincidentally on target? The unctuousness of the Israeli response, the scene of utter devastation, both stand for contrasting worlds of dominance and repression, and always, with Israel, whether as insouciance or deniability, accountability is the last thing wanted.

Israel absolves itself by giving warnings—here, evacuate, "because the surrounding area was a combat zone." How, combat zone in the first place, given the area's residential nature and the known fact that the school was a U.N. refuge for civilians? And then the decision to leave—too



late! They write, “The civilians who had taken refuge in the school had been gathering in the courtyard preparing to flee just when it was hit multiple times, according to witnesses.” Israelis were not unaware of the school and its function. Even the day before, a U.N. relief official in New York told reporters that “at least 72 United Nations schools, hospitals and offices have been damaged in the latest fighting, even though they are visibly marked.” (This may be a cheap shot on my part, but Israel’s contempt for the United Nations is well known; I, for one, suspect here “pay-back” time, in this case a “twofer,” because Palestinians were involved.) They continue: “Each and every one of their GPS references have been provided to the Israeli military,” said the official, John Ging, director of operations for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.”

Tellingly: “The Beit Hanoun school was the third one serving as a shelter to be hit in the current conflict [the fourth, vacant]. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency [U.N.R.W.A.]... said that more than 140,000 residents of Gaza were now staying in 83 schools where it has set up shelters.” The day before, “a school sheltering 2,000 people in Deir el Balah, in central Gaza, was struck in what was believed to be a drone attack.” In Beit Hanoun, witnesses to the school attack said “they had gathered in the courtyard and were waiting to be evacuated to a safer area when explosives rained down.” The grimness of the scene is the raw stuff of war-crimes material: “Eight of the dead and about 80 wounded were brought to the Kamal Odwan Hospital, the nearest facility, where rooms and hallways were packed with wounded patients and their relatives.” The people said “they had fled with their families from homes in the areas days before because of Israeli shelling and the situation in the school had been getting worse as food and water became scarce.” (From other sources, e.g., the BBC, we see interviews with doctors in the hospitals, in which medical supplies were also becoming scarce and hospitals were becoming morgues.)

Down to human scale. “It was early afternoon, after they had gathered, that the strikes came.” Here is Mohammed Shinbary, “We went to the school to be safe and then they hit the school,” stated as he was “kneeling on the hospital floor and cradling his wounded daughter, Mahasin, 7.” Here too, Amina Nassir, standing “over a single gurney holding two of her daughters: Fatima, 13, had lost a chunk of flesh from her leg and Aya, 12, had a broken shoulder and had shrapnel wounds on both legs.” All of the survivors agreed, only “after they had gathered that the strikes happened. Most said there were at least four strikes, though they were unclear what kind of explosives hit the school. Many appeared shocked that the attack had occurred inside the school grounds, a place they assumed would be spared.” And finally, Nidal Shayboub, age 20, who said that “he and 27 members of his extended family had been staying at the school because of shelling near their homes. Mr. Shayboub, his pants bloody from a shrapnel wound in his buttocks, said a friend had told him that four of his relatives had been killed: [his] mother, brother, and two aunts.”

Amina Nassir captures the prevailing mood: “I don’t know where we can go now. We can’t go home and even the schools are unsafe.” Homelessness, so common to the World War 2 refugee, defines a reality experienced by all in Gaza, refugees in their own land.

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From the Hubbard-Rudoren article, the school bombing is provided additional context. “[A]s the war engulfed their homes, families in this northern Gaza town packed up their belongings and children and headed to the one place they presumed would remain safe: the United Nations school.”

The source of the bombing remains unconfirmed, but signs, although the reporters and U.N. are noncommittal, point more here to Israeli culpability. First we see again, it was after Palestinians “gathered in the courtyard... believing they were about to be bused elsewhere, [that] blasts tore through the crowd, killing 16 people and sending scores of wounded, mostly women and children, streaming into local hospitals.” Timing clearly suggests premeditation, particularly since the U.N. had notified the Israelis of its intentions.

Conflicting testimony: “People in the school reported three to five blasts and accused Israel of shelling them. Israel suggested that rockets fired by militants might have fallen short of their targets or that the school might have been hit with errant shells from either side in fighting nearby.” Yet, “[t]his was the fourth time that United Nations schools had been struck.” Robert Turner, director of U.N.R.W.A. for Gaza, explained the agency’s role in providing services for the Palestinian refugees (its status was similar to that of a government: “It runs hundreds of schools and medical centers, oversees infrastructure projects and provides regular food to about half the population.” We learn that “more than 70 percent of Gaza’s 1.7 million people are registered refugees, most of them descended from Palestinians who fled or were forced to leave their homes during the war over Israel’s creation in 1948.” In sum, Israel had an authoritative body to work with, had it wished to—the schools as places of refuge (too, hospitals!) as firmly off-limits in any sane view of the world. This gross imbalance of the opposing forces, refugees and large-scale unemployment set against Israel’s wealth, power, technological advancement, military forces and nuclear arsenal, suggests a hegemonic disproportion easily translated into sadism, the need to show superiority toward and in the process humiliate those underfoot.

Turner, a credible observer, stated that the U.N. “had not confirmed the source of the blasts,” but that “in the earlier instances when schools had been hit, he was ‘certain’ that Israel was responsible.” His office “had told Israel that hundreds of people were sheltering in the school and provided its coordinates—12 times—most recently at 10:56 a.m. Thursday [the day of the bombing]. He said that it was the only shelter in Beit Hanoun where the agency was still providing services, after others had been deemed too dangerous, and that the Israeli warnings had made the United Nations decide to withdraw its staff and tell the Gazans it was no longer safe.” The courtyard, busses waiting, the bombing begins.

Postscript: At this writing, Sunday, July 27, there are reports of Hamas’s acceptance of a 24-hour truce, no word yet from Israel, according to Kershner and Hubbard in their Times article, “After Rocket Attacks From Gaza, Israel Resumes Fire,” who also write, “Huge clouds of smoke could be seen rising from the eastern neighborhoods of Gaza City that run close to the border with Israel, and fewer Palestinians were out on the city streets than on Saturday, as they appeared to be hunkering down again.” Meanwhile, sentiment in Israel, official and popular, is building up for widening the campaign. There is pressure on Netanyahu, seen by many as not sufficiently hawkish, “from partners in his governing coalition and also from some ministers within his own party not to take the pressure off Hamas at this point.” Go all the way; occupy all of Gaza. So-called centrists, e.g., Shaul Mofaz, member of the Knesset and former defense minister, said on Sunday that “Israel had enough troops inside Gaza and stationed along the border to take the ground operation to ‘the next stage’ and recommended ‘exact[ing] a direct price from Hamas’s leadership.’” Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home party opposed any cease fire—go all the way: “Israel stands at a decisive moment.”

Rudoren's article, "Amid Outcry Abroad, a Wealth of Backing in Israel for Netanyahu," (July 27), provides an up-to-date description of the inner mood of Israel, the siege mentality, ironically, of the aggressor, and with Netanyahu's poll numbers skyrocketing, along with near-unanimous commentary that world criticism is creating a backlash merely determining Israel to act with greater impunity. Tzipi Livni, darling of the centrists, is constantly at his side. But Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the US, sums up the psychological dimensions of the invasion. He uses "the Hebrew phrase 'Im kvar az kvar,' roughly akin to 'in for a dime, in for a dollar.' If we're getting slammed, we might as well go all the way." The greater the international criticism, the greater Israel's belligerence. There will be more Beit Hanouns, more dead children, more rubble, becoming the hallmark of Gaza's landscape, more fear, displacement, suffering—and for Israel, false pride, insensitivity, silencing of critics, contempt for humankind, eating away at that part of Judaism which preaches human solidarity and the social welfare.

JULY 30, 2014

### **Escalation of Sanctions a Step Toward War**

The cylinder turns, which is the fatal bullet? Or, are all the chambers loaded? America, particularly under Obama, has pressed for global counterrevolution on a grand scale, perhaps more than Bush father and son and even Clinton, the quartet together exhibiting a presidential disease of hegemonic unilateralism, still Obama in the forefront. His national-security team, drenched—when needed—in liberal rhetoric, views the Outside World with suspicion, ideologically hardened by a previous half-century of strident anticommunism and, though Russia and China have adopted clear capitalistic structural features, treats all opposition to US political-economic-military policy as in its origins red-tainted. For us or against us, no middle ground allowed! The preset, kneejerk response to all challenges to US real and prospective areas of domination, trade, financial, even cultural, signifies, beyond xenophobia and ethnocentrism, a deep-seated psychopathology of authoritarian rigidity invoked at every turn where Exceptionalism and corresponding acts of war, intervention, regime change, or forcible market penetration, are opposed or questioned.

America provides the military as surrogate for the Freudian couch in resolving—that is, living with—its aggressive instincts, draped in the thin veneer of liberal humanitarianism. We stand at the barricades in support of all freedom-loving peoples, now, the Israelis and Ukrainians, against terroristic desperadoes, who lack appreciation for Western values and institutions. The demonization of Putin comes naturally to such a mindset, while Li can be confronted in the more pragmatic terms of a Pacific-first strategy and Trans-Pacific Partnership, partly because Russia got there first in the morbid configuration of hate. Not all, in either case, is psychological. American global hegemony has, at least since the Great Depression, been about the advancement of US capitalistic interests, if need be, at the expense of other capitalist nations (initially, dismantlement of the British Empire, so that trade could be placed, post-Imperial Preference System, on a "fairer" basis, while the military preparations and home-front hysteria, to be directed against Russia and China, was useful for ensuring absolutist conformity at home and resistance to Third World autonomy and development abroad.

There was always something opportunistic in the American hostility toward Russia, an Enemy still useful in promoting American-inspired globalization, a system of world capitalism under US

supervision and leadership, Russia and China kept at arms' length rather than fully embraced to ensure the resolute will and war-budget in the US while serving as warning to indigenous radicalism in Latin America and other spheres of influence hitherto taken for granted. The foundations of Behemoth America were becoming shaken, ever since the end of World War Two, but today, with the rise of precisely those powers the US has placed in its crosshairs, the recognition of impending decline (from a perch of unilateral supremacy) is calling, under Obama, for more strident militarism, even if, as here, cloaked in sanctions. Sanctions, however, should not be confused with the peaceful application of pressures. They are presently another name for war, and given the prevailing US-EU mindset and leadership, a clear step in that direction.

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Ukraine is Berlin all over again, a disputed locus for legitimating East-West tensions on terms more momentous perhaps than the late 1940s, because today the West believes it could actually dismember Russia through a US-sponsored unified front, dismemberment for reasons probably not even known to its advocates, beyond the usual mix of oil and natural resources. The Post-Cold War World is nothing of the kind, as though the darkened specter of Thanatos, which I noted in earlier articles, trumps ideology and economics as instead a residual bottom line of anomic feeling toward humankind. Children in Gaza are murdered while the world yawns, Israelis cheer, and Americans turn away. There is little in the life-plan of America (if we can speak thusly of the direction a society takes) that warns against the dangers of confrontation leading to horrendous consequences. Let the end come, seems the shibboleth of the times (or, as a child, I remember, "better dead than red," perhaps less sincerely believed than today's version, ennui replacing supposed communism *per se*). Here then is Obama, thinking eyeball-to-eyeball with Putin, who has proven himself far more reasonable and less fanatical in his actions, and, perceiving correctly the risks involved in the build-up of a US-Western sanctions regime, plays down the conflict by not retaliating in kind.

MH 17 is the best thing that could have happened to US foreign policy at this juncture, providing an out to Britain, France, and it appears now, Germany, in affording a rationale for accepting America's lead in the imposition of stronger sanctions against Russia—not nearly as tough as Obama wants, but enough to keep the alliance from breaking up because of his demands. This was a real problem for the US when Obama's threatened unilateralism if the EU failed to act resulted in open disaffection, especially that of Germany. The resistance encountered by the Kiev military in eastern Ukraine, possibly as much as, or more than, the plane crash itself (the cause of which has still not been determined, with rebel forces guarding the site awaiting investigators who themselves have been delayed by Ukrainian government troops fighting in, and making a war zone of, the area of the crash), has brought the EU into line behind America, the props knocked out from underneath its earlier unwillingness to comply. Still, between the lines, we see a reluctance, particularly in Germany, to comply.

Jack Ewing and Peter Baker's article in the New York Times, "U.S. and Europe Set to Toughen Russia Sanctions," (July 28), quotes Antony Blinken (a name we're less familiar with, Obama's water carrier on sanctions), deputy national security adviser, who keeps the US-EU distinction on the toughness of the sanctions in reserve: "We expect the European Union to take significant additional steps this week, including in key sectors of the Russian economy. In turn, and in full coordination with Europe, the United States will implement additional measures itself." In search of cooperation, Obama cannot renounce unilateral powers to act. Blinken continues: "Our purpose

here again is not to punish Russia but to make clear that it must cease its support for the separatists and stop destabilizing Ukraine.” As though the US did not support the government and directly contribute to destabilizing Ukraine in the first place through promoting the coup and bending every effort to give it legitimacy in world opinion!

The propaganda mill grinds on, Russia via Ukraine poised to envelop the West, the playing on fears in the manner of the falling-domino theory, none of which is expressed outright (which exposed and/or verbalized would reveal its scare-technique), but at a step or two removed, advantaged by the climate of fear engendered through emphasis on counterterrorism. Meanwhile, like Banquo’s ghost looming in the mist, the presumed threat of China, joined in the American political imagination with Russia, lies on the immediate geopolitical horizon—a blow against one, surely it is believed, helps to destroy the other. Not surprisingly, a totalistic framework (and ideological vision to match) of world power and dominance, characterizing the US from at least the late 19th century Open Door through Wilsonian internationalism, then into post-World War 2 containment stretching outward from the context of the Cold War to take in the retardation of Third World modernization, to the present, the most strident assertion of hegemony perhaps yet, because that reference point of efficacious unilateralism is in process of collapse, explains how almost helter-skelter America is involved everywhere at once. Simply, the Empire is crumbling, and the present-incumbent Emperor wears no clothes, exposing a petty tyrant credited with sophistication as meanwhile displaying the everyday garden-variety dumbness, insensitivity, and lack of imagination we associate with ersatz world-beaters, hiding behind America’s massive military structure, surrounded by an intelligence community, from CIA to NSA, to ensure international dirty-tricks and the prodigious surveillance of the American people, whatever it takes to keep the US on top and himself looking “cool” and princely.

Hence, escalating sanctions in the Ukrainian situation is part of America’s negative engagement with the world—our way or the highway, only now blocking the road at every turn, so that it takes little to see how the current foreign policy preoccupation forms an integrated picture in Washington: Ukraine/Gaza, a dialectical interplay feeding into the larger confrontation with Russia and China, is all about American “prestige,” now, as before, code for global hegemony wherein, give an inch and you lose the ballgame. This US mental set, hardly confined to Obama (which is why he basks so in the favor of the military and intelligence communities), of stepping up to the plate, not content with less than home runs, therefore becomes visible on all fronts. The ball park though is shrinking, Putin, Li, and a whole bunch of players coming on the scene, finally making clear to grandstand and bleachers alike, especially the bleachers, that the System had been rigged for some time: Ukraine, Gaza, wherever resistance to the US-defined Western nucleus—now, not coincidentally asked to participate in the sanctions regime—appears, must be vanquished. Dead children, vast stretches of rubble, population displacement, all to prove a point—who said the falling-domino theory is obsolete? America, like Israel, its shadow, sees Armageddon in every act of defiance to its own and its friends-and-allies’ dominion, and accordingly to be PUT DOWN.

My New York Times Comment on the Ewing-Baker article, same date, follows:

Sorry, nascent Cold Warriors in Washington and Europe, but these sanctions are ill-conceived and will backfire. What the West is doing is, of course, driving Russia closer to China, the latter more than happy—and quite able—to supplant Europe on economic matters.

But economics aside, the point is that Russia will not go away. It is real and, with Putin, able to direct its policies and behavior in ways that are not abrupt and extreme. FM Lavrov's statement of refusing to go tit-for-tat is a welcome sign of rationality, that which Obama so evidently lacks.

The US is playing with fire (literally). There would never have been a Ukraine crisis had not America helped stage the coup that, as much as we try to cover this up, has a preponderance of fascist elements in governing circles. Obama coddles Right Sector and Sveboda, and exerts pressure on the EU to go along. The US appears to welcome international tension as a way of maximizing its political-economic-military global influence. At what price to world peace?

At what risk of nuclear annihilation? All of this as the world is habituated to look the other way whenever major conflicts are present. Not mentioned in the article, the purpose of siding with Ukraine is to bring NATO forces to the Russian border—a sure way of escalating tensions, perhaps to the breaking point. Obama and his national security advisers give new meaning to the game of Russian roulette.

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Then on the 29th, the EU, “with both new resolve and longstanding trepidation,” as Alan Cowell and James Kanter put it in their NYT article, “European Officials Weigh Tougher Sanctions on Russia,” has buckled under to American demands. The reporters know whereof they speak when they underscore the seriousness of the move: “Imposition of the sanctions would mark an expansion and escalation of a confrontation with Russia that is arguably the most serious of the post-Cold War era and a test of the European Union's ability to act decisively in a foreign policy crisis.” Only in the last part of the sentence, the “test,” do they reveal matter-of-fact acceptance of the need for such action, i.e., a post-Cold War era that is not post-anything but very much still alive. Don't bother to ask, “Which side are you on?”, because there is only one side in the battle between good and evil, back to a Manichaeian square one: Push back Russia, contain and isolate China, defend Israel at all costs—lest the world come tumbling down, and with it (please do not think me facetious) American capitalism. The integral relation between Gaza and Ukraine in America, and not only among members of the Jewish community, is bedrock-belief, as well I've seen, when adopting a critical orientation to either taps a vituperative stream extending to include my position on both. Anticommunism/counterterrorism is alive and well, though having little to do with either, serving rather to buttress a world order based on domination (and for the nonprivileged, consequent impoverishment).

From sanctions to military engagement is hardly a bizarre scenario, particularly when the first is meant to lead, should the terms be favorable, to the second. These terms, however, refer to ever-expanding alliance-building, military stockpiling, the course Obama now busily pursues, a fool's-dream to begin with, yet captive to a near-irrevocable decision always to go for broke, whom- and whatever stands in the way. Gaza is a Russia-China-Third World, rolled in one, menace—ditto, Ukraine dissidents—subject to withering punishment and as the warning shot across the bow directed to the Circle of Evil imagined to be enclosing it. For America, there will never be enough enemies to confront and dislodge. But in the case of Russia, in and of itself, (the same goes for

China), we see nuclear conflagration as a distinct—to fall back on national-security lingo, OPTION, as in “all options are on the table”.

AUGUST 1, 2014

### **Israel's Exterminatory Impulse Toward Gaza**

Disproportionate power yields the psychopathology of sadism. This becomes circular, for sadism does not come out of thin air, its presence—whether through the experience of conquest, arrogance inhering in a superiority mindset, the profound darkness of introversion and collective nightmare of, here, having suffered the Holocaust and internalizing poisonous thoughts, values, and actions of the Perpetrators, or, as I believe, ALL of the foregoing—is itself the catalyst for creating and enlarging disproportionate power ready for use and to be used continually to demean and debase the Other and periodically in spurts, as now in Gaza, to take special delight in cruelty while therefore, because of subjugation of the weaker and defenseless, taken as self-confirmation of moral-political exceptionalism. Netanyahu (not the individual alone, but the personification of a nation, particularly its military elite, self-regarded and identified as The Jewish State, conferring a certain license on those deemed included, rather than an equalitarian- based democratic polity) combines the bureaucratic grounding down, impersonal, unfeeling, of the Gazan people, with—again, the nation in support of his policies—the delight in cruelty of the Marquis de Sade. Eichmann/Sade, the unrestrained execution, under premises of search-and-destroy in UN safe havens, now JABALIYA, of penned-in fear-stricken children. Child murder may not, although it should, get one before The Hague Court, but the stain of war criminal will not be easily removed from Israel's international reputation. What I write is not anti-Semitism; rather, it is condemnatory of Israel exactly because of its defamation and distortion of Judaism as I've known it, the radical-humanistic-intellectual-aesthetic record over the last 150 years, courageous in the struggle for human emancipation, freedom of thought, social transformation—all directly violative and destructive of the rights and aspirations of Palestinians and, increasingly, the oppressed everywhere.

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Inflated rhetoric? Hardly. The sustained killing by Israelis, constant, multipronged (weaponry: air, sea, land), intended for obvious and blatant terrorization pure and simple—only an Eichmann would array the forces to strike and a Sade to wait for a crowded courtyard or a middle-of-the-night bombardment—requires a gift for words to describe I do not have; but inflated, no. The situation is far worse, the child, two weeks premature, delivered by cesarean section from the mother killed by an Israeli bomb, and, despite frantic efforts, who died age five days; the deliberate targeting of the major power plant which supplies electricity to Gaza, so that all the services dependent on it, from hospitals to water treatment plants, were impeded in their functions or halted altogether; a virtual pond of sitting ducks unable to move, to be shot at the whim of the invader/occupier. And Israelis turn a blank face to the atrocities, or offer pro forma tears, and in some cases, go out and celebrate (as I earlier described, the hillside spectators at Siderot with their cheers, drinks, and munchies). Yes, the sadism of power, the power of sadism, a reciprocal process of dehumanization leading to more atrocities.

My words fail, but those who suffer have a simple, honest eloquence fully up to their suffering. From Ben Hubbard and Jodi Rudoren's New York Times article, “Israeli Shells Said to Hit School

in Gaza, Killing at Least 20,” (July 30), we read first: “The strikes came in rapid succession. At around 5 a.m. Wednesday [the 29th] at a United Nations school at the Jabaliya refugee camp, where 3,300 Palestinians had taken refuge from the fierce fighting in their Gaza neighborhoods, what appeared to be four Israeli artillery shells hit the compound.” The account continues: “One hit the street in front of the entrance, according to several witnesses. Two others hit classrooms where people were sleeping. Palestinian health officials said at least 20 people were killed by what witnesses and United Nations officials said was the latest in a series of strikes on United Nations facilities that are SUPPOSED TO BE SAFE ZONES [my caps.] in the 23-day-old battle against Hamas and other militants.”

Stop here a moment: 5 a.m. bombing attack; a UN school used as a refugee camp (from other sources we learn the Israeli military forces were repeatedly given the coordinates, so as to avoid an attack on a presumably safe haven [here I have to say, this was one of six UN shelters bombed, Israelis, by their actions, favoring the targeting of schools, hospitals, and mosques—as well as infrastructure]); 3,300 Palestinians, manifestly, extreme overcrowding in a very limited space; fierce fighting in neighborhoods (Israeli troops in house-to-house searches, using machine guns); four shells, more than enough, and deliberately placed, for this finite area of humanity; classrooms where people were sleeping (we’ve seen the images of people packed in, mothers clutching children; finally, the belief these were safe zones, thus drawing the families in. But why go on, details rolling off the world’s back as the slaughter does not abate? Instead, the eloquence I mentioned, here Ahmed Mousa, age 50, in the courtyard when the shells hit: “My house was burned and death followed us here. Where am I supposed to go?” Offensive ground troops in the neighborhoods defies civilized values, and the school/shelter bombing, the same, compounded by the Israeli explanation that militants “‘opened fire at Israeli soldiers from the vicinity’ of the school in their Jabiliya refugee camp [add refugee camps to the list of favored targets, as noted in an earlier article, and brought home by Sharon’s merciless attack on one in Lebanon setting a precedent] Wednesday morning, and that the Israeli troops ‘responded by firing toward the origins of the fire.’” This the official word, and “firing toward the origins of the fire” does not elicit confidence of appropriate behavior.

At this writing, the matter is under investigation, Israeli jargon for doing nothing or a whitewash when atrocities are involved. And of course, never an apology, a presumed sign of weakness that shatters the image of invincibility. As the reporters note, under what I take to be similar circumstances, “The military had earlier denied responsibility for 16 deaths last week at a different United Nations school serving as a shelter, in Beit Hanoun, saying that the only piece of Israeli ordinance to hit the school compound, an errant mortar, struck when the courtyard was empty.” The courtyard was NOT empty, more explosions hit the same compound, and the Israeli stock answer, to Jabiliya as well, is that errant Hamas firings, aimed at Israel, fell short and hit the compounds.

Robert Turner, Gaza-based director of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency), sees it differently, the agency, “sheltering more than 200,000 Palestinians in 85 of its schools,” having already had between five and seven attacks on its facilities, was now “still checking reports that a school in the Shati refugee camp and one in the Mamouniya neighborhood of Gaza City had been hit overnight.” And he added, understated, as I find to be his wont from other comments earlier, “‘What we’ve seen in our shelters is indicative of what we’ve seen more generally. When they started naval bombardment, artillery and tank fire, that’s just not as accurate as airstrikes. They



can't see what they're shooting at, so we've seen more destruction, more damage, more death." A bit too laconic for what the situation warrants, but perhaps making him a more credible witness in his recounting of the deaths.

The grimness of the onslaught does not rest: Palestinian death toll as of the 29th, more than 1,250 Palestinians, mostly civilians, 56 Israelis, 3 civilians; overnight, five mosques hit; and a taste of going all-out, seen in the statement of Brig. Gen. Motti Almoz, chief spokesman for the Israeli military, over Army Radio, who declared, "The progress is toward an offensive. We are shoring up the targets already reached and are taking over new locations. There are a lot of targets in the Gaza Strip, and we are attacking from the northern to the southern Gaza Strip." In Gaza, Hubbard and Rudoren write, "there was little sign of a letup: an Israeli missile killed 10 members of the Astal family who had huddled in their diwan, or meeting room, according to news reports and the health ministry, among other major strikes." And this at a time of relative quiet from incoming rockets to Israel.

Nevertheless, the picture in Gaza darkens still more: "Jabaliya, a refugee camp just north of Gaza City, has been under intense artillery shelling since Tuesday afternoon [the 28th], killing 50 people over a 24-hour period, health officials said. Already one of Gaza's most densely crowded areas, its streets had been packed in recent days with people who fled their homes closer to the border when Israeli troops invaded. More and more had crowded into the Abu Hussein girls' elementary school." Here we are, and here the reporters' discussion serves, whatever their intent, as a brief indictment of genocide. Turner had provided GPS coordinates of the school to the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) 17 times, including 8:48 p.m. before the next morning's shelling, "to ensure it would be spared." Instead: "At least four strikes hit in close succession in a straight line across the school compound, INDICATING ARTILLERY FIRE (my caps.), according to people who saw the attack; one struck a house behind the school. The drop ceiling of one classroom collapsed, and the tin roof was peppered with shrapnel holes. The ground was covered with rubble, clothing and pools of blood. Sunlight shone through a hole in the roof of another classroom, also hit by a shell." (BBC showed much of these scenes at the Abu Hussein school on the evening broadcast of the 30th.)

Through it all, the UN itself, despite a severe statement holding Israel accountable for vast devastation, does little, perhaps mindful of the US's veto in the Security Council. Thus, under extreme provocation of the shelling of another UN facility [on the 27th], words did not match the nature of the offense. The reporters again: Robert Serry, UN special coordinator for the Middle east peace process, "released a statement on Wednesday saying that his agency's compound in Gaza had also been hit early Tuesday morning 'by a number of projectiles which caused damage to the main building and to United Nations vehicles.' A preliminary assessment showed five strikes on the compound and two on the ground outside, the statement said." Errant Hamas shots? Not likely. Serry said he "is deeply concerned about this incident and other violations of United Nations premises during the conflict," but he "did not directly blame Israel." In fact, his statement leaves much to be desired: "We have to remind relevant parties to the conflict of their responsibility to protect United nations operations, personnel and premises which must remain inviolable." With that, the Israeli military might well be laughing between its teeth.

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The Guardian, Harriet Sherwood reporting, “Gaza: at least 15 killed and 90 injured as another UN school is hit,” (July 30), adds several important details to the foregoing account, notably, the statement of Pierre Krahenbuhl, commissioner-general of UNRWA, that he condemns “‘in the strongest possible terms the serious violation of international law by Israeli forces,’” and continues in words graphically revealing the tragedy: “‘Last night, children were killed as they slept next to their parents on the floor of a classroom in a UN-designated shelter in Gaza. Children killed in their sleep; this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame. Today the world stands disgraced.’” Explaining they had “‘analysed fragments, examined craters and other damage...[and that] our initial assessment is that it was Israeli artillery that hit our school,’” Krahenbuhl concludes (note the final sentence): “‘It is too early to give a confirmed official death toll. But we know that there were multiple civilian deaths and injuries including women and children and the UNRWA guard who was trying to protect the site. These are people who were instructed to leave their homes by the Israeli army.’” In other words, directed to the very shelters that were to be bombed! Plaintively, he adds: “‘Our staff, the very people leading the humanitarian response [,] are being killed. Our shelters are overflowing. Tens of thousands may soon be stranded in the streets of Gaza, without food, water and shelter if attacks on these areas continue.’”

Further voices, here, Assad Sabah, huddled with his five children under desks in a classroom of the school, “the constant sound of tank fire throughout the night,” told the Associated press: “‘We were scared to death. After 4.30am, tanks started firing more. Three explosions shook the school. One classroom collapsed over the head of the people who were inside.’” And Sherwood: “‘The last two nights have seen the most fierce bombardment in this Gaza offensive, with intense air strikes, tank shelling and bombardment from Israeli gunboats.’” Abu Hussein followed Beit Hanoun (my earlier article on this mass killing), Israel pleading there, too, an empty space, the playground, while large numbers gathered for busses to evacuate them to a safer place (if that were possible!). Meanwhile, the Israeli public is unmoved by the atrocities (conversely, self-defense in their mindset), Sherwood reporting: “‘But support for the military operation among the Israeli public remained solid. A poll published by Tel Aviv university on Tuesday found 95% of Israeli Jews felt the offensive was justified. Only 4% believed too much force had been used.’”

As for the destruction of the power plant, which Amnesty International called, “‘collective punishment of Palestinians,’” this “strike on the plant will worsen already severe problems with Gaza’s water supply, sewage treatment and power supplies to medical facilities.” “‘Everything was burned,’” said Fathi Sheik Khalil of the Gaza energy authority. Genocide—deliberate and systematic destruction of a group, here in Gaza protracted, into the fourth week of the invasion, not only in time, but in thoroughness of the destruction, a land of rubble where not only the power plant but the Strip and, of course, the very lives of the people who have survived, will take years to rebuild.

Sudarsan Raghaven, William Booth, and Ruth Eglash, in their Washington Post article, “U.N. agency: Israel shelled Gaza school sheltering evacuees; 20 reported killed,” (July 30), supply further details on the school bombing: “‘...shelling struck a classroom where some 50 people, mostly women and children, were sleeping.... Most of the dead, however, were young men, who had woken for the traditional Muslim dawn prayer, said Moen al-Masr, a doctor at the Kamal Odwan hospital. The Post’s reporters continue: “‘We found people torn to pieces,’ said Allah al-Bes, 33, who was seeking refuge at the school with his wife and three boys. ‘It was like hell.’ Bes

and his family went to the school after an earlier attack on a UN-run school in Beit Hanoun. ‘We have learned no place is safe in Gaza,’ he said.” Let those final words serve as an epitaph for, illustrating, and bearing out, the Israeli genocide of Gaza.

AUGUST 4, 2014

### **Israeli’s Adeptness at Genocide**

The Jewish State uses religion as a subterfuge to hide political-military aggrandizement. Nothing quite like this psychotic exhibition of statecraft—and utter desecration of religion per se. To all critics, Israel and its propaganda organs abroad, notably, AIPAC, rush in to charge “self-hating” Jew to silence dissent among Jewish people, while non-Jews are merely and quickly labeled anti-Semites. How long can this racket continue? How long the BLASPHEMING of Judaism, yes, nothing short, because insulting G-d through acts of murder, cruelty, vengeance, and therefore the profanation of a religion devoted to His service and therefore treating what is sacred with contempt? How long ethnic cleansing, population displacement, promiscuous killing of the innocent, hauteur and sangfroid in the act of bombing hospitals, refugee-packed UN schools now shelters to escape the constant bombing and ground-forces’ actions in residential neighborhoods? Not a tear (except of the crocodile variety, rote, sanctimonious in the face of gut-wrenching human suffering), never an admission of wrong-doing, always an insinuation, the slyness of the authoritarian mind, that the other party is culpable.

Let’s define terms: (a) assault, by which I mean a direct attempt to overpower by violence of onslaught—an outrageous violation—to which I am tempted to include, because of Israelis’ observable arrogance, demand for superiority, and, through militarism and military buildup, the urge to domination as national policy and national character trait, an element or overtones of sadomasochism having perverse sexual content, here, assault as the derivation of pleasure from the infliction of physical or mental pain, in the case of Gaza, physical, as in the widespread destruction and ever-present rubble, and mental, premeditated tactics intended to terrorize the civilian population; and (b) adeptness, by which I mean proficient, specifically, knowledge and experience in an endeavor, proficient implying competence derived from training and practice, to which adeptness adds special aptitude as well as proficiency. It is Israel’s special aptitude for the disproportionate application and use of power which makes of Gaza, as though revealing the genius of the Israeli soul, its barrenness, a graveyard and free-fire zone for the murder and mutilation of children.

The facts are undeniable. BBC evening news, August 2, interview of a ten-year old Gaza girl, her house crumbling around her, next door, both grandparents and three uncles killed in the bombing and shelling, her own almost stoical expression, asking over and over, why, why, why? A child’s wisdom, directness, elemental, without subterfuge, and on the Israeli side—blankness, as the slaughter goes on. Reports are not fabricated: hospitals grossly overcrowded, limited electricity and water if any, shortages of medicine and food; feelings of absolute insecurity, the constant refrain, “Where can we go, how can we be safe, how escape the bombing?” Children bloodied, on gurneys in hallways, parents moaning, holding a dead child—if one applied a moral calculus, what is worse, the infliction of the death and pain, or insensitivity to the commission of the act, whether done by

oneself or by others in one's name? To call itself The Jewish State, Israel legitimates genocide in the name of G-d.

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In previous articles I discussed the major atrocities of this recent invasion of Gaza, as have other writers in CounterPunch, and, the pattern established after nearly four weeks of all-out, indiscriminate assault (not really indiscriminate, because this has been premeditated targeting to inflict maximum destruction, demoralization, and suffering), I would turn most recently to PM Netanyahu's intent, carrying the nation with him, of total pulverization and humiliation of the Gazan people. I noted earlier his peculiar fusion of Eichmann and the Marquis de Sade, the impersonalization and bureaucratization of the infliction of pain, almost as though imperative to boosting the collective ego of Israel while enclosing it in walls of deniability. Can this situation last? Yes, as long as the international community remains indifferent to, or craven in the face of, Israel's engagement in genocide, and, for the US, as long as AIPAC can bully the Jewish community, Congress, the media, into, beyond acceptance, approval of Israel's actions, and the closeness of the military and intelligence communities continues with its counterparts there.

For the world and the US, this is more than simple opportunism. Israel's political-historical-ideological function is to serve as the advance agent of global counterrevolution, as witness the way Muslim-Arab nations, faced with their own fears of the specter of democratization, have sided with or remained silent about the Israeli invasion of Gaza. Whether Russia, China, and Brazil, for example, are prepared to go against the ideological tide, and whether the UN can extricate itself from America's inordinate influence, is unclear, especially given Obama's exercise of brinkmanship with respect to Russia and Ukraine (who ever thought we'd see, under the supposed banner of liberalism, the reincarnation of John Foster Dulles, only still more dangerous and unprincipled?), even this weekend, pulling the US out of negotiations for prevention of nuclear war. The proverbial "all options on the table," Obama's mantra, fits well with an exacerbation of tensions by charging, without evidence, Russia's participation in the downing of MF 19.

Let's turn, then, to Israel's role in Gaza these first days in August. That the casualty count has continued to climb, despite the widely recognized atrocities committed in the bombing and shelling of UN schools clearly designated as shelters for refugees forced to flee their homes, at Beit Hanoun and Jabaliya (the coordinates of which were continually transmitted to Israeli forces), and other defenseless civilian sites of extreme vulnerability, together indicating murderous intent and constituting significant war crimes, attests to the unpitying, callous attitude toward wreaking death, through sustained lethal operations, on a PEOPLE—a collective punishment—pronounced by the Israeli leadership and public and executed by the nation's military. Yet, a bottomless well of deniability, i.e., when the cheering stops. Known facts of slaughter have made no dent in the Israeli conscience. In moral philosophy it may be debatable which is the more egregious: wanton murder, or refusal to acknowledge its commission. Israel, however, has its cake and eats it—first, ignoring the reality of its actions, then erasing them from memory (in the process of finding extenuating circumstances through blaming others).

Begin with this scene of the local conditions facing hospitals in Rafah, described by the New York Times reporters Ben Hubbard and Fares Akram in their article, "Hospitals in Gaza Overwhelmed as Attacks Continue," (Aug. 3): "It was clear from the bodies laid out in the parking

lot of the maternity hospital here that it had assumed new duties: No longer a place that welcomed new life, it was now a makeshift morgue. Other bodies lay in hallways and on the floor of the kitchen at Hilal Emirati Maternity Hospital. In the walk-in cooler, they were stacked three high, waiting for relatives to claim them for burial.” As in Gaza City, hallways and floors of hospitals teemed with wounded, children looking up with beseeching cries, shrapnel in back and neck—it is doubtful the full scope and range of human misery were put on Israeli television, for if permitted to be seen how continue the incessant airstrikes and tank firings unless military and public alike found the resulting punishment irresistible? The reporters continue: “Saturday [Aug. 2] was the second day of heavy bombardment by Israeli forces on this city on Gaza’s border with Egypt after Israel’s announcement that one of its officers had been captured by Palestinian militants here during a clash.”

Even if true, this did not warrant revenge killings of civilians, but by Sunday morning “the Israeli military announced the officer...was now considered to have been killed in battle.” Hadar Goldin was cynically used by the government as the pretext for going on a rampage of killings, with no evidence to support the accusation. He was, the offensive underway, trotted in to justify its ferocity: “Israel’s offensive had emptied neighborhoods, shattered the city’s central hospital and killed more people than its remaining health facilities could keep up with. But for the residents of this dusty city of 150,000 people... the assault had unleashed such a wave of terror and death that Lieutenant Goldin, whose fate was unknown when the assault began on Friday [Aug. 1], was scarcely considered.” Dr. Abdullah Shehadeh, director of Rafah’s largest hospital, Abu Yousef al-Najjar Hospital, stated: “It is just an excuse. There is no reason for them to force the women and children of Gaza to pay the price for something that happened on the battlefield.”

And as elsewhere, there was no let-up in Israeli pressures, as though terrorization and body counts vied in friendly competition for Israel’s attention. The reporters write: “After two days of Israeli shelling and airstrikes, central Rafah appeared deserted on Saturday, with shops closed and residents hiding in their homes.... More than 120 Palestinians were killed in Rafah alone on Friday and Saturday—the deadliest two days in the city since the war began 25 days ago. Those deaths, and hundreds of injuries, overwhelmed the city’s health care facilities.” That Friday afternoon, “Israeli shells hit the central Najjar Hospital,” Dr. Shehadeh reporting the evacuation of staff and patients, thus compounding the problems of overcrowding and insufficient facilities already faced.

I hope Israeli self-righteousness and smugness is fully aware of the societal depravity their policies and values, embodied in the destruction to others of bombs, missiles, shells, has caused to fellow human beings—depravity twofold because also the internal corruption, to their religious ethos and founding myths. The whole scene is dispiriting, more, shocking, and yet, a microcosm of what was happening throughout the Strip—in areas fortunate enough even to have medical facilities: “To continue receiving patients, his [Dr. Shehadeh’s] staff members moved to the smaller Kuwaiti Specialized Hospital, although it was ill-equipped to handle the large number of people seeking care. Ambulances screamed into the hospital’s parking lot, where medics unloaded cases onto stretchers sometimes bearing the blood of previous patients. Since the hospital had only 12 beds, the staff members had lined up gurneys outside to handle the overflow.”

What is the point of continuing? Israel, AIPAC, congregants everywhere, the universal voice of DENIAL of what is happening, as though right out of World War 2, only oppressor and oppressed now switching roles, Israel, as I have suggested in previous articles, having introjected the

psychological poisons, and some noticeable character traits (e.g., cruelty, impersonally felt and expressed), of those responsible for, and who perpetrated on them, the unspeakable crimes of the Holocaust. And the description continues: “The city’s central hospital [Najjar] had also housed its only morgue, so its closure created a new problem as the casualties mounted: where to put the bodies.” The reporters go on, “At the Kuwati Specialized Hospital, they were put on the floor of the dental ward under a poster promoting dental hygiene. In a back room lay the bodies of Sadiya Abu Taha, 60, and her grandson, Rezaq Abu Taha, 1, who had been killed in an airstrike on their home nearby.”

I present these details further, knowing the rawness of the setting, yet necessary to take the measure of Israeli conduct—facts which could be duplicated daily and multiplied over every square mile of Gazan territory, so devastating the onslaught, so flagrant the (war)-criminality. And this at Day 25, people transmogrified into cattle to be prepared for slaughter: “Few people approached the main entrance to the pink-and-white maternity hospital, instead heading around back, where there was a constant flow of bodies. Nearly 60 had been left in the morgue of the central hospital when it closed, so ambulance crews who had managed to reach the site brought back as many bodies as they could carry. Other bodies came from new attacks or were recovered from damaged buildings. New arrivals were laid out in the parking lot or carried down a ramp to the kitchen, featuring a large walk-in cooler. Some were kept on the ground, and those not claimed right away were added to the pile in the cooler.”

We are speaking of human beings, something Israelis, by their actions, lifestyle, and rhetoric, were not bound to respect applicable to Palestinians, this among the most sickening aspects of the intervention and treatment of them under the Occupation. In this light, Israel’s emphasis on the Hamas rockets and tunnels—the same search for attenuating circumstances—appears wholly unconvincing as license or as explanation for the killing machine in progress, and unconvincing because not showing resistance would be interpreted as exoneration for one, submission for the other. Here Rafah takes its place with Gaza City, Beit Hunoun, and Jabaliya, milestones on the road to decimation and/or flight, bulldozers crushing homes now writ large in the form of modern weaponry and to the same end of destroying a people’s will.

More faces, that one may know the lineaments of oppression: “Word had spread that the dead were at the maternity hospital, so people who had lost relatives came to talk to the medics or look in the cooler for their loved ones. One short, sunburned man pointed to the body of a woman wearing pink sweatpants and said she was his sister Souad al-Tarabin. The medics pulled her out, laid her on a table and wrapped her in white cloth and plastic. Some teenagers helped the man carry her body upstairs and lay it in the back of a yellow taxi. A man in the front seat cradled a small bundle containing the remains of the woman’s 4-year-old son, Anas. Sitting nearby, Asma Abu Jumain waited for the body of her mother-in-law, who she said “had been killed the day before and was in the morgue at the central hospital when it was evacuated.” Ms. Abu Jumain said, “She was an old woman. She did nothing wrong.” Then we find Mohammed al-Banna who said that “an airstrike the morning before had killed nine of his in-laws, including his wife’s father and four of her brothers.” Banna: “The aggression here is creating a new generation of youth who want revenge for all the crimes.” He searched unsuccessfully for his lost relatives: “I’ll keep waiting for their bodies to come in so we can take them home and bury them.” He did not know how to break the news of their deaths to his wife, who told him that “she was starting to worry because her father’s cellphone

had been switched off all day.” To which Banna replied, “I told her maybe he has no electricity and his phone is dead.””

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Rafah simultaneously witnessed another attack by Israelis on a UN school, killing 10, wounding 25; on Sunday [Aug. 3], 71 Palestinians deaths were recorded, the total now 1,822, with 9,370 wounded. At the school, 3,000 had sought shelter, and according to witnesses “those killed or hurt were waiting in line for food supplies when a missile hit.” The Times account, Steven Erlanger and Fares Akram’s article, “Airstrike Near U.N. School Kills 10, Gaza Officials Say,” (Aug. 3), reveals the same Israeli message as at the earlier Beit Hanoun and Jabaliya school bombings, to wit, “The Israeli Army said that it had targeted with the missile three members of Islamic Jihad on a motorcycle near the school, not the school itself, and was investigating a possible secondary explosion when the motorcycle was hit.” Who us? A UN worker on the scene, Mohammed Muafai, said by telephone that “there were bodies on the ground, including two guards and a sanitation worker. He said seven more people from displaced families also died, including one selling flavored ice.”

Netanyahu, the night before [Aug. 2], announced on Israeli television an ostensible pullback of troops in certain areas; in an understated version of the no-compromise position, he declared, “We promised to return the quiet to Israel’s citizens, and we will continue to act until that aim is achieved. We will take as much time as necessary, and will EXERT AS MUCH FORCE AS NEEDED.” (my caps.) There will be no negotiated settlement. The damage will be done, Israel maintaining its right to flex its muscle power at will, as in the now-current phrase, “cutting the grass,” to signify periodic offensive operations in the Territories to keep Palestinians underfoot and locked into permanent subjugation. Meanwhile, children die, whether by bombs, inadequate nourishment, or loneliness, their parents taken from them in a world that doesn’t care.

My New York Times Comment to Steven Erlanger and Jodi Rudoren’s article, “Gaza Operation to Last as Long as Needed,” (Aug. 2), which began the recent round of reports on Gaza, follows—except that it will no longer be found in the Comments section, having been deleted presumably because a reader found it objectionable (I entered a complaint to the Public Editor):

“[We] will exert as much force as needed.” This, despite leaving Gaza already a wasteland of rubble, having also attacked hospitals, power plants, UN shelter/schools, mosques—scenes reminiscent of World War 2 and possibly worse. Yet world Jewry applauds the war crimes of Israel, unable to see how much Israeli war lust defames, sullies, makes a mockery of Judaism itself, which over the last 150 years has been in the vanguard of human rights.

The real “self-hating” Jew is the Israeli, who blindly and bluntly tears apart the sublime ethics of Jewish philosophy. Israel hides behind Judaism to commit war crimes. It doesn’t get uglier than that. The Gaza invasion is GENOCIDE.

AUGUST 8, 2014

## **Psychopathology of the Zionist Mind**

In explaining the Israeli compulsion to pulverize (the Zionist element at least), whether into submission or into smithereens, the Palestinian people of Gaza, a moot point, one can combine Marx and Freud by way of explanation, as did Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, on a related problem: the instinctual realm of profound layers of darkness, in which consciousness of evil on the oppressors' part must be obliterated (for Marcuse, the repression of Thanatos as it continues to do its ugly work), in Israel's case, its destruction of the Palestinian memory (memory as historical awareness, legitimation of group-existence, including pride and sense of place, claims to survival and growth) through mounting the disproportionate use of force, a species of overkill, metaphorically, the Israeli military-psychological bulldozer. Rather than the massive machinery for crushing homes, which in any case continues, it is intended to crush the human spirit—as already seen in the widespread devastation, rubble everywhere—now addressing the very **IDENTITY** of a whole people, physical genocide, as impersonally tabulated in the grim statistics of body counts, but in addition, mental genocide, the attack on a people's self-knowledge, culture, achievements in letters, the arts, political thought.

I never imagined Israel's campaign of mental genocide, a pervertedness which speaks to, and leaves no doubt about, premeditation in the commission of thorough destruction: shackles, torture, bombs, but this, rooting out the foundations of a people's existence, all for the purpose of exercising domination over them and, by debasing and depersonalizing them, experience relief from the guilt of having done so—catharsis without knowing and feeling it because having structured the situation so as to treat the victim as nonexistent, a cipher, emphatically inferior, or all of the foregoing plus, for that reason, given license to dominate (and really, exterminate) without the slightest moral blemish. Therefore, when I speak of the dialectical interplay of memory and conscience, I have in mind relations of domination and submission, this, as a first approximation, yet from that point, the complication arises because it is the oppressed whose memory is being forcibly suppressed, while, as the condition for what follows, it is the oppressor whose conscience is numbed, frozen, perhaps repressed, though how repressed when the aggression toward others bespeaks a moral vacuum that even repression can't touch? Psychopathology of the Israeli mind, the habituation to domination driving out all self-recrimination.

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How do we know this? I was awakened to this dimension of genocide (even as once a historian, I was never attracted to the concept of "memory," a seemingly voguish distraction from class, power, and exploitation) by Evan Jones's recent *CounterPunch* article, "The Pariah State," excellent in all respects, and to be read alongside Arno Mayer's, *From Ploughshares to Swords*, near-definitive in critical aspects of Israel's self-definition, march to statehood, and gathering militarism. But among Jones's topics covered, drawing on writers, like the father of Yehudi and Hepzibah Menuhin (two musicians-plus-more I feel especially attracted to) whose works may be largely known only to specialists—an admission of my own weakness, there is a section, "The annihilation of identity," truly significant in pressing the analysis of Israelis' inner psychological logic of, and political-military disposition to, genocide. I invite the reader to study the article, the totality of his evidence in mind, to see how the onslaught on identity makes perfect sense in the physical-mental liquidation, as occurring thus far and for decades in Gaza, of the Palestinians.



Jones writes (citing Nur Masalha's *The Palestine Nakba*, 2012), "Having denied the existence of a functioning Palestinian society before expropriation, Israel's founders of necessity confronted its existence.... The myth of the non-existent Palestinian society had to be forged in reality." Hence, ethnic cleansing, forcing Palestinians out (the NAKBA), leaving them without "social and political integration." Then, of extreme importance complementing forced population displacement, "the physical space had to be furiously appropriated—the landscape destroyed, built over; everything re-named." Hence too, "the cultural landscape: memory, history, identity and its artefacts." Jones quotes Masalha on the campaign of the Israeli government, in 1948, to appropriate (i.e., steal/plunder) "for itself immovable Palestinian assets and personal possessions, including schools, libraries, books, pictures, private papers, historical documents and manuscripts," to which he adds, "several private collections and tens of thousands of books were looted by the Haganah and never returned." In 1958, "the Israeli authorities destroyed 27,000 books, most of them Palestinian textbooks from the pre-1948 period, claiming that they were either useless or threatened the state. The authorities sold the books to a paper plant."

Obviously the extermination of memory, a process that, with widening acts of terrorism, intellectual and physical, has continued to this day. Jones writes in summary: "In short, the strategic and systematic annihilation of identity." To which I would add, benefiting from his discussion, that although combining Marx and Freud may be problematic, the sexualization of domination may be seen in the thoroughness, cynicism, cult of impunity, attached to the wholesale confiscation of Palestinian accumulated learning and knowledge. The punitiveness of the assault, as though tearing apart the fabric of Palestinian life and culture, and the self-confidence with which it has been carried out, has an element of sadomasochism almost necessarily—here specifically the rape of the Palestinian mind, on condition the rapist becomes successfully devoid of conscience, examples of which can be seen in the troops in massive armored vehicles, thrilled by the power underfoot and oblivious to the damage they have wrought, then too, the Israelis cheering on hillsides as explosions light up the Gaza sky, or the whining about sacrifices in their Tel Aviv cafes, or further cheering in their living-rooms watching television, all of which devoid equally of consciousness, so rote-like the manufacture of killing fields.

The sexualization of domination was perhaps not important to Marx, domination per se, in its myriad pungent class forms—labor exploitation, to foreign policy imperialism and colonialism, to commodity tyranny and fetishism at the epistemological foundations of capitalist society, to culture and ideology emanating from the gross inequality of class-differentiation—being enough on his plate, but this aspect of domination cannot be overlooked when one considers the sadism at the core of domination, whether political-economic or taking more bizarre forms. Without his brilliant understanding of the relations of dominance and subordination, superiority and inferiority, there would be poorer psychological understanding of the correlates of domination, merely perversities standing alone, shorn of societal context. Freud was Marx's natural ally in the crucial respect that even his psychoanalysis drew on his metapsychological theorizing, as in *The Pleasure Principle* or *Moses and Monotheism*, all-important context for fusing individual and societal repression. For me, a useful synthesis would be Adorno, et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), an uncanny anticipation of the Israeli mindset and (I toss this in gratis) our ever more militaristic POTUS.

The act of eradication requires psychic energy. Depersonalizing Palestinians wipes—or seems to wipe—the psychological slate clean for the dominator/oppressor, who can feel nothing when the

victim has been rendered faceless, anonymous, inanimate, on the order, drilled into the military forces and integral to the Chosen-People ethos as currently interpreted, of killing a two-dimensional cardboard figure. Yet, when the human identity of the victim breaks through, perhaps largely standing his/her ground and committing acts of resistance, then the dominator goes ballistic, and the sadistic urges/energies flow like water (or arsenic?)—the urge to ERADICATE, to silence or dissipate guilt. I return, as in my previous articles, to the psychological legacy of the Holocaust, which I take to be reaching to the darkest layers/levels of the Unconscious, and then transmitted to later generations, as the vortex of domination internalized as the practices of the oppressor. This takes on a perhaps Darwinian selective process because it works so well, i.e., an institutionalized form and expression by the State, here Israel and the IDF. The dead children entombed in rubble testify to the mightiness of the Israeli state.

AUGUST 13, 2014

### **Israel's Military-Psychological Bulldozer**

In explaining Israel's invasion of Gaza, much can be learned by combining the analysis of Marx and Freud, as did Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, on a related problem: the instinctual realm of profound layers of darkness, in which consciousness of evil on the oppressors' part must be obliterated (for Marcuse, the repression of Thanatos as it continues to do its ugly work), in Israel's case, its destruction of the Palestinian memory (memory as historical awareness, legitimation of group-existence, including pride and sense of place, claims to survival and growth) through mounting the disproportionate use of force, a species of overkill, metaphorically, the Israeli military-psychological bulldozer. Rather than the massive machinery for crushing homes, which in any case continues, it is intended to crush the human spirit—as already seen in the widespread devastation, rubble everywhere—now addressing the very IDENTITY of a whole people, physical genocide, as impersonally tabulated in the grim statistics of body counts, but in addition, mental genocide, the attack on a people's self-knowledge, culture, achievements in letters, the arts, political thought.

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AUGUST 15, 2014

### **Pathology of Domination**

Psychiatry deals with the individual, but why not a social psychiatry which deals with collective behavior, values, mindset, that of a nation with its particular history, social structure, behavior, in this case, as measured by war, intervention, policies of drone assassination, torture, and rendition, opposition to world democratization, and internally, widespread class differentiation and income/power disparities, deregulation of its financial and corporate systems, massive surveillance to tamp down possible dissent and resistance, in short, a society of emergent fascism? Social psychiatry (unlike social psychology) may not be a recognized academic/medical discipline, yet how else comprehend the political consciousness and perhaps repressed Unconscious of a people, bound together, actively or in complicity, by a common set of institutions and cohesive framework of power—no resistance to which is presently in sight or even seemingly contemplated?

Questions are easy to phrase, answers, more difficult. But the record is before us, current policy threads which can be seen with respect to Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, as part of a global military-economic posture of counterrevolution aimed and directed ultimately at Russia and China and, down the road, the rising industrialization-modernization of the Third World, already evident, as represented by Brazil, by a middle tier of world power. Domination is scary, particularly when it is so institutionalized in the fabric of the social system as to be second nature, unquestioned, to the

extent that American politics is to all intents and purposes Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the consensual pursuit of advanced capitalism as the permanent foundation of the American social order at home and its projection abroad, unilateral, in governing the world political-economic order. Today's news: Obama and Clinton create sparks in a jar that is hermetically sealed, one outdoing the other in expansionist confrontation as part of a renewed Cold War to arrest America's imperial decline. Republican opponents, novices at the game, sputtering belligerence, are no match for "liberal humanitarianism" as an instrument of conquest.

Gaza symbolizes where we're at, eradication of human aspiration through proxy force, here Israel, or in Ukraine, fascist remnants from the Second World War, or in Latin America, *summa cum laude* graduates of Fort Benning's School of the Americas, proficient in maniacal techniques of killing, indeed, wherever one looks, ongoing human wreckage and suffering by those we support, as meanwhile, the US acts on its own in achieving the military architecture of an acceptable global pattern of trade, finance, and power, keeping its war industries at full blast in the process. Iraq and Afghanistan, neither accidental to the grand design nor, for that matter, incidental, as America, not satisfied with preponderant influence in Europe, seeks a comparable beachhead and sphere of influence in the Middle East (already assisted by the closest possible military-intelligence linkages with Israel) and, though oil is an obviously high priority in that region, a possibly equally high geopolitical/geostrategic priority, in Asia (there marked by the Obama Pacific-first strategy and Trans-Pacific Partnership) to contain, isolate, and weaken China. Busy, aren't we? Domination requires no less.

Frigidity, by which I mean the solipsistic bubble surrounding and encasing America, with its companion traits of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, respectively, fear of the stranger, the dichotomous relation of we-they driving the ideology of Exceptionalism, and their resultant, an overriding authoritarianism as at the core of the American personality structure, has much to do with rigidity, unifying and integrating the actual policymaking of the US government, the business community always at its right hand, though also with national-security advisers expressing a puristic ideological dimension as the reified anticommunism of apparently bygone days (yet still infecting thought processes contingent on hegemonic aspirations). We have become frozen in our defensive-reactive formation, understandably, given that the American project of wealth-concentration lodged in an infinitesimally small elite has repercussions for poverty at home and a generalized foreign policy of world stabilization favorable to US interests. The inequitable nature, as it applies broadcast, of all that ruling groups in America touch, a direct line, for example, from the White House to the children buried in rubble in Gaza, or the executive suites of Morgan, Chase and of Goldman, Sachs in creating recession, unemployment, foreclosures, translating into homelessness, malnutrition, health problems on a global scale, should reasonably be sufficient ground for a collective sense of GUILT. Yet, frigidity/rigidity, we are beyond that, culturally, institutionally, politically protected from self-knowledge for our deeds of commission and omission. Instead, America is *sui generis*—itself requiring much psychic energy and reinforcement to maintain—the Greatest Democracy the world has ever seen.

The social psychiatry I spoke of (not to be confused with national-character analysis fashionable in the mid-20th century) lies in the institutional matrix of higher-stage capitalism as found primarily in the US which seeks and promotes the creation of political-cultural uniformity of human personality necessary to the achievement of social discipline, which uniformity is constantly

reproduced and reinforced in daily life through every resource and social mechanism—education/indoctrination, consumerism, religion, patriotism, official propaganda, media, even sports as the inculcation of competitive values, winning, the martial spirit, these for starters—brought to a convergence through subtle cues of superiority-inferiority resident in the class structure and displays of wealth, and keeping up the drumbeat of war, intervention, superiority-inferiority in the ranking of nations.

One does not need the Freudian couch to explore the etiology of the diseased mind. Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, all exhibit a symptomatic arrogance furnishing useful cover for what I take to be a moral void, impervious to human suffering, feasting on the self-indulgence of the nation then communicated downward to the people (most of whom, unable to partake, learn to adjust through self-recrimination), prone to organized violence, as in regime change and/or coming to the assistance of “friends and allies,” in subduing social forces and avenues to modernization thought to be harmful to, not only American interests, but also the protective walls of the mind keeping us from self-knowledge of ourselves and our crimes in the world.

Herewith, my New York Times Comments (both Aug. 14), which indirectly prompted this article, one, on the Clinton-Obama feud alluded to, the other, on American music, recalling for me a different time, when America possessed an anti-fascist vision, integral—as I saw it—to justifiable national pride. The articles serving as a point of departure are: (I) Michael Shear, et. al., “Is This Island Big Enough [Martha’s Vineyard] for Clinton and Obama?”, and (II) Anthony Tommasini, “They Heard America Playing: Copland, Thomson and Others in a Fantasy Music Festival,” Comments also same date”

## I

No greater testimony to the narrowness of the American ideological spectrum. Obama and Clinton BOTH favor war, intervention, deregulation, support of major banking, a resistance to democratization in America (as witness growing disparities of income, wealth, and power), Clinton attempting to create separate political space by outdoing Obama on prowar/procorporate policies. And why not, her husband Bill gave us Rubin economics and the end of Glass-Steagall. Moral bankruptcy of the Democratic party since the days of FDR and the New Deal? You bet. Confrontation with Russia and China has replaced raising the living standards of the American poor. The Vineyard sounds like an ideal place for the festivities of the American elite. It was not always so.

## II

Left out? In the early 70s I hosted a party for the English Chamber Orch that performed on campus. After a year in London, having listened to Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, etc., I was sitting on the floor lamenting the state of Am. contemporary music with Emanuel Hurwitz, when he properly dressed me down—our own Elliot Carter. And he was right. Sessions, Piston, of course, but Carter must also receive his due—precisely because unassimilable to the American ear.

But I wish to make a personal appeal for Copland’s Third Symphony, which, as a radical from my early years to the present, I held to closely for inspiration as the great Anti-Fascist Symphony, itself written in wartime and bringing together the mood of courage and

affirmation. I wish I could have thanked Copland. Hours before going in for my generals (doctoral exam, in Am Civ) at Harvard, I walked (practically marched) around the Yard internalizing the music so as to reach peak intensity when I entered the room in Holyoke House for the exam.

Yes, music can not only raise the human spirit, it can, with Copland's Third, summon from the depths a clarity of thought and instill a spirit of resistance still (hopefully) strong more than a half-century later.

May I also add to the list, Hanson's Second?

AUGUST 18, 2014

### **Militarization of Globalism**

In a jaundiced US national foreign-policy perspective, Obama, befitting America's steadily moving shift politically, ideologically, culturally, sharply rightward, is somehow viewed as weak, vacillating, lacking sufficient will to stand up to Aggression (capitalized because seen as all-pervasive, coming from every quarter: militant Islam, Russia, China, even Gazans), and thereby presumably a Leftist, when in fact he occupies the exact, predictable position marking an extension in US hegemonic claims to unilateral global supremacy effected through war, intervention, trade agreements, military alliance systems, market penetration, international financial and banking pressures and manipulations, that we have seen since the close of World War 2. Lack of toughness? Hardly. Departure from the Cold War? No, further continuities, only slightly more cosmopolitan in the use of proxy forces, drone assassination, rendition, the while speaking words of peace and social justice, i.e., the cover of liberal humanitarianism as screws are tightened both on regional spheres of influence and Third World aspirations toward modernization.

Yet for much of an imperialist-thirsty America, not enough: Support Kiev, encourage serious rearming of Japan, hasten Israel's destruction of Gaza, push regime change in Syria and wherever—and this, merely in today's news, for the long-range picture is more decisive in the elucidation and practice of American power. Presently, under Obama, the US is on a collision course with the world, his nearest comparison in point of militarizing an acceptable definition of US-inspired (read: directed, supervised, administered) globalism would be three-fifths John F. Kennedy, two-fifths Ronald Reagan, that superb bipartisan mix of main-force over-the-top militarism and the nitty-gritty suppression of indigenous movements of social change. World dominance with respect to major power systems, localism in the eradication of national liberation struggles, a petrification of world order, grounded on American military foundations premised in turn on the expansion of US capitalism as principal architect of the international political economy—what in a franker day, we called Counterrevolution, now muddled by not only liberal humanitarianism but also counterterrorism. The Islamic Assault is manna from heaven for America's global extension of power, as is liberal humanitarianism for sanitizing both imperialism and the encirclement of Russia and China.

Obama means business (ignore the pun) facing off against Russia and China through respective regional alliance systems and largely exclusive trading frameworks (and for the former a sanctions regime) while domestically continuing the trend of deregulation to the advantage of

corporate/banking concentration and a consequently stronger business voice in formulating the aims of foreign policy. Domestic policy, in business's favor, is already a foregone conclusion. Here liberalism bears special scrutiny, as ideological camouflage for the war-provoking tendencies in US foreign policy, Woodrow Wilson the prime exemplar of its use in market expansion (liberalism an energizing factor in world trade, as against the Republican isolationists nakedly imperialist ensconced behind a high protective tariff), an historical course anything but harmless when it is realized that market expansion is not an abstract pursuit but always supposes a strong military presence whether brought into play or held in the background. Obama while not aware of the historical background weds Wilsonian internationalism with Theodore Roosevelt's Battleship Navy (suitably brought up-to-date with carrier groups, long-range aircraft, extensive paramilitary operations, and, of course, a stunning nuclear stockpile). Liberalism in America, even in the late-19th century Open Door, was never really liberalism, its military undergarment always showing.

To be more specific, liberalism has been true to itself in its fashion, primarily antiradical in its genesis and practice, and primarily to soften the rough edges of capitalism while not undermining its essential structure or impeding the wealth-concentration process of class differentiation. To be not-reactionary counts for something in waging a battle on behalf of the status quo, chiefly, through enlivening sources of false consciousness, particularly in foreign policy where identifying expansion with democracy (our famous Turner Thesis was the ideological prop for joining the two internally) sends an electric charge through the body politic through patriotism, a cult of strength, and the use of force. In this regard, liberalism was and remains blood-soaked transferring the psychodynamics of patriotism, strength, and force to capitalism itself, the two becoming the same (the basic synthesis, liberalism/capitalism, at the core of Exceptionalism, both as ideology and militarized implementation), and for Obama the launching pad for further political-commercial expansion.

It may seem like hitting below the belt (it isn't), but drone assassination so beautifully exposes the moral pretensions, negation of humaneness, and contempt for the rule of law, of liberalism. It is however not alone in this regard, Obama's talking point that he inherited a mess (including drones) and therefore cannot be held accountable for, e.g., the Iraq war, assassination, events in Africa, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe, etc., begs the question of WHY NOT reverse course, renounce intervention, eschew regime change, stop using the IMF and World Bank as battering rams for securing economic-financial penetration, above all, renounce—demonstrated through action—unilateral dominance of the world system and gracefully concede instead the existence of a multipolar global framework where hegemony is both destabilizing and no longer realistic. And the foregoing, just in foreign policy, because domestic course-reversal is also critically important if the US is to abandon—under Obama thought anathema—global hegemony. His whole purpose is to keep the US on top, an uncontested given in the American political universe, “on top” being construed not as the romanticization of power and prestige, enough perhaps to suck-in a mass constituency, but, starting with military supremacy, a political-economic- ideological dominance forcing the world system in all its myriad forms to pivot around the Nation, its needs, its perceived superiority. Liberalism, the paradigm of the Divine Order, Obama and his critics to the Right (there has been insufficient criticism from the Left) partaking with equal fervor Exceptionalism as guiding myth and rationale, differences occurring only in the realm of means. Simply, to his critics, he has not been sufficiently decisive, code for, more military engagement, more military spending, eyeball-



to-eyeball confrontation with Putin and Li, macho America not afraid of mushroom clouds to prove its toughness.

In Obama's defense (back-handedly, to be sure), he has been plenty tough already, as in the cumulative development of foreign policy, in not one instance or policy arena modifying hegemonic goals, indeed, being more pronounced in viewing and taking action to counter Russia and China as interrelated threats, in what should be acknowledged as a renewed Cold War spirit, than most if not all of his predecessors, dating back to Harry Truman. Nor on his watch have defense budgets—as well as military assistance to governments in the business of suppression, whether of their own people or others—slackened, while domestic needs go largely unmet. He is indistinguishable from the presidential pack. In addition, there are the less visible integuments of national power on pace and more: continued nuclear modernization, greater lethality of weaponry, and still largely unnoticed, more emphasis on paramilitary-special forces operations integrated with CIA activities, hiring of private contractors, covert warfare, all protected by the negotiation of status-of-forces agreements with the countries to which our “brave warriors” have been assigned, avoiding prosecution in the event of the commission of war crimes. As with so much else about the Obama administration, this is just for starters, thus reason enough for invoking the Espionage Act against whistleblowers and mounting the most ambitious campaign of massive surveillance of the American people in US history. Where there's smoke (and this looks like a four-alarm blaze) there must be—or at least the presumption of—war crimes. Why else the defensiveness?

And yet critics of Obama call him soft (the imagery right out of McCarthyism, this directed against one who is himself an adept pupil of the Meister of Defamation). We turn, then, to Peter Baker's New York Times article, “As World Boils, Fingers Point Obama's Way,” (Aug. 16), Baker, along with David Sanger, altogether trustworthy in accurately parroting the Administration line, as though enjoying White House access of a special kind, here with an excellent sampling of critics and supporter alike. (It is difficult to know which is more disheartening, Obama's supporters maintaining the same overall framework, but with greater finesse.)

Baker writes, “In this summer of global tumult, the debate in Washington essentially boils down to two opposite positions: It is all President Obama's fault, according to his critics; no it is not, according to his supporters, because these are events beyond his control.” Welcome to the kindergarten of the mind, which is Washington, for me, a pox on both your houses, were it not that you dwell under the same roof (however cantankerous on the surface, perhaps to give the illusion of policy differences on imperialism). Criticism and praise, equally disheartening, for one—“his critics have made the case that Mr. Obama's mistakes have fueled the turmoil in places like Syria, Iraq and Ukraine”—and for the other—Obama “has increasingly argued that his power to shape these seismic forces is actually limited”—presents a phony dichotomy, implying that some golden mean would resolve the issue, or more likely, for Baker, these “seismic forces” provide extenuating circumstances. Obama is not God, he can't do everything; give him credit for statesmanship in doing what he is able to accomplish.

Obama: “Apparently, people have forgotten that America, as the most powerful country on earth, still does not control everything around the world.” Not for want of trying, I would add, but the important point, neither Obama, and his supporters nor his critics address the questions: what kind of control and control TO WHAT END? Control is the alchemic formula for achieving what must be whispered, lest the word get out alerting world opinion to America's urge toward global

hegemony at almost whatever cost or self-knowledge because of such ambition might have crippling effect. Vagueness, obfuscation, false consciousness, do your work, so long as the sweep of historical continuity is not obstructed. No, retract the statement, if not too late, Obama, “because it was seen by adversaries as a cop-out and even by more sympathetic analysts as a revealing moment for a president whiplashed by international instability.” Cop-out: bomb the hell out of everyone; whip-lashed by international instability: as though America is helpless tossing about in the wind and had not contributed to, or bears responsibility for, the contexts in which it finds itself in trouble. (Here, add Ukraine and the coup, to interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.)

Baker summarizes the critics (the actual vitriol, testifying to, for many, an overt fascistic worldview, as when McCain visited Kiev, not directly quoted): “The bill of particulars against Mr. Obama is long. In the view of his critics, he failed to stanch the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria when he rejected proposals to arm the more moderate elements of the Syrian resistance. He left a vacuum in Iraq by not doing more to leave a residual force behind when American troops exited in 2011. And he signaled weakness to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, encouraging the Kremlin to think it could intervene in Ukraine without fear of significant consequence.” Yes, ISIS simply grew from nowhere, and could have been stopped; yes, full-throated occupation in Iraq forever and a day to quell internal disturbance; yes, the risk of nuclear conflagration because of Ukraine. But in each case, Obama did not sit on his hands. He bears responsibility for interfering in Syria to achieve regime change (probably at Israel’s behest), giving ISIS breathing space; he was party to the Iraq intervention, playing on internal forces of division to keep the hand-picked regime in power; Ukraine, however, takes the cake, for without US-EU assistance on regime change, there would have been no crisis, and no intended NATO march to the Russian border.

Then, still inclined in direction toward the same world view, more modulated, but no less hegemonic in content and thrust, Obama’s supporters want to put more starch in his collar to stand up to America’s Enemies. Close to home, Hillary leads the pack, the vacuum ISIS supposedly filled in Syria, James Jones (retired NATO commander and Obama’s first national security adviser), more troops in Iraq, punish Syria for crossing the “‘red line’ by using chemical weapons,” and arm Kurdish forces, and Strobe Talbott (head of the Brookings Institution), in mitigation, “‘We have an overall contagion of diffusion which makes it much harder to advance the cause of regional and global governance,” the “cause” however still being US pre-eminence, now more difficult because of “the diffusion of power from states to nonstate forces, the rapid spread of technology and the rise of Islamic extremism.” Points well-taken, but each in turn grist for the American-military mill. One of my favorite Democrats, Jane Harmon, now head of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, presumably holds the key to American supremacy and answer to Obama’s critics: Persist on the hegemonic course, war, intervention, what she aptly terms re-engagement with foreign policy, but be a more effective communicator in selling that foreign policy to the American public. She states on Obama: “What he’s come up with in Iraq and in Ukraine are sensible strategies. He now needs to link them with a narrative that explains to the American people why we have to re-engage in foreign policy matters, and I hope he does that.” Then all will be fine, sensible strategies to the rescue.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker article (also Aug. 16) follows:

Both Obama and his critics occupy a practically minuscule spot on a comprehensive political-ideological foreign policy spectrum, as though POTUS were somehow to the Left

when in fact he is consistently pursuing a geopolitical strategy, like his predecessors, of US global hegemony (in his case just as involved in military premises for action).

To wit, more than Bush, Obama presses for confrontation with Russia and China, his advisers bent on containment, isolation, ultimately, if not dismemberment, then drastic weakening in world affairs, to be accomplished, in one case, via Ukraine, positioning NATO forces on the Russian border, and, the other, the Pacific-first strategy, shifting military “assets” into the region, dovetailed with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Obama is John Foster Dulles with a smiley face, but possessing little of the other’s sophistication, only his belligerence. There are no softies in the White House: Brennan, Rice, Powers, as hearty and committed a set of Cold Warriors as one could want. Critics to the Right of Obama (only in America does one find such gut-warrior sentiment, parading gung-ho anticommunism a la Joe McCarthy days, under the heading of counterterrorism) simply want to get further, faster to the same destination than he.

In the present world match-up I think Putin and Li far more reticent about aggression, and far more aware of (and partly responsible for) the multipolar power system rendering US unilateralism dangerous and archaic.

AUGUST 20, 2014

### **US-Israeli Regional Hegemony**

Alliance systems can be a perfidious or at least unscrupulous thing, entered into by the parties, whether two or more, in the hope of maximizing each’s national self-interest covering a multitude of purposes—military, political, ideological, defensive, offensive, in character, addressed to power, the expansion of political economy, spheres of influence, financial-commercial penetration, frequently all of the above, and intensified under conditions of wartime—particularly perfidious or unscrupulous when the parties are unevenly matched in power, dominance by one often (but not always!) resulting to the detriment of the other(s). In the 20th century the US-British “special relationship” or, serving both in two world wars and postwar reconstruction after the second, the Anglo-American Entente, illustrates convenience in the quest for HEGEMONY, America benefiting from British military cooperation and, beyond, a world trading structure facilitating open markets, the reduction of tariff barriers, and a stable international monetary system, as meanwhile, despite this seemingly close embrace, the US, during and following the war, made steady progress in weakening then dismantling the Imperial Preference System and consequently eroded the power of the British Empire (America’s chief competitor in world trade, and a main obstacle to its leadership of capitalism as a global system). No holds barred, where power and political economy are conjoined, at which point ideology comes into play in the effort to redefine the world order, i.e., the Cold War, the Free World, American Exceptionalism in full bloom as exemplar, protagonist, vehicle for achieving Democracy in the face of the threat posed by modern day Bolshevism, Russia to the West and China to the East.

The 20th century mindset remains with us, outfitted in new clothing, yet with surprisingly little changes as viewed from the American perspective, Russia and China still demonized for purposes of maintaining the military foundations of the American polity (in spite of the capitalist inroads

made into the societies and cultures of each), US hegemonic aspirations based on unilateralism still ever popular and intact, yet now facing grave obstacles, perhaps greater than at any time since the 1960s, because the world power system is becoming decentralized, manifested not only in the obvious quarters, Russia, China, the EU as a concert of powers, and the industrialization of the Third World, but also conflicting currents within the preceding and a ripening of discontent affecting the world order, which, as it shakes down, can yield any number of possible outcomes, as for example, military dictatorships, popular awakenings and overthrow of despotic regimes, the regrouping of international relations (chiefly, a rapprochement between Russia and China overcoming historical mistrust over decades, brought together through American policies and actions—most recent, Ukraine and NATO/Pacific-first strategy and TPP—directed against both), together suggesting a world in tension at knife's point. One further constant from the American perspective is its close relationship to Israel, every way germane—more so than ever, given the reshaping of the world structure—to the attempted perpetuation of US global hegemony.

Perfidiousness still holds, on both sides, despite which, the alliance because of mutual convenience and underlying ideological propinquity, remains rock-solid, as each pursues comparable policies of military and/or political-economic conquest generally not in each other's way (and if anything, complementing one the other). For each, the world becoming, as brought on by their actions, more menacing, has the result of creating a siege mentality elevated to matter-of-fact desensitization through colossal arrogance toward the commission of war crimes against others, increasingly taking on the proportions of genocide. America and Israel alike, one the supplier of funds, arms-and-ammunition, and diplomatic cover at the UN, the other the faithful executioner of disproportionate often overwhelming force as though in the service of a Higher Being, yet pursuant to concrete purposes of domination, exploitation, and territory, have together staked out the Middle East as a crucial sphere of influence, America piggy-backing over Israel to enlarge the sphere as in its own right making possible the exercise of control covering an arc from Southern and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Near East, and North Africa, while for Israel itself the immediate region and neutralizing prospective power-blocs will do. A perfect match-up on the altar of POWER reified to the extent of impunity in its exercise—with extermination the end point on a continuum consonant with and created for the purpose of expansion and subjugation, humans standing in the way no more than fly specks.

Domination, in its geopolitical, geostrategic, and, not usually recognized, geopsychological, form, is on a slippery slope, extermination—an outcome not predetermined, arising from historical circumstances and structural context—being the product of authoritarian values rooted in the society's political culture and its ideological expression, in America, the hierarchical-class overlay on nominal equalitarianism, in which both wealth and power have been disguised as democratic, lending credence to and legitimating upper-groups' superior position and right to rule, while in Israel, the formulaic hierarchy resides in a religious-sourced chosen-people doctrine overlaid on a militaristic underpinning anything but nominal, applied to the Outsider, and internally, a political-military leadership system to a large extent acting independent of, though in the name of, civil and religious institutions. In both cases, the US and Israel, counter-forces to the exercise of military power are weak to nonexistent (still retaining formalistic democracy in order, consciously or not, to hide hegemonic purpose, internal social discipline, and boundaries of dissent, as needed to ensure popular approval and/or complicity in a course of permanent war, the preparation for war, or the status of recognized command wherever its military reach extends).

For the US, as if the world could be flattened and neatly demarcated into territorial squares of varying size, control has always meant a process of as near TOTAL the coverage of these separable spheres of influence, the more secure—by definition—America would be, lest eruption, or worse, omission, in one place, lead to the toppling of predominance elsewhere. “Prestige,” that seemingly silly justification for war readiness, military budgets, enforced patriotism, is actually code for the pragmatic realization that domination, as Americans see it, is a zero-sum game, interlaced with an extreme fear of societal decline, in which the falling-domino effect is integral to the quest for hegemony, particularly its unilateral form. Thus, every square to be covered, accounted for, the Middle East especially attractive and necessary for obvious reasons, OIL, and less obvious ones, the geopolitical-geostrategic framework alluded to in that regional context, not only the territorial access from Spain to Turkey and the upper portion of Africa, but also slightly distanced pressure points on Russia and China. If for no other reason, Israel would then be seen as indispensable in completing the military paradigm of critical spheres of influences also matched elsewhere throughout the world.

But in fact there are other if not as compelling reasons for championing the cause of Israel, concretized in the near-integration of their respective military, intelligence, and planning/think tank communities. Israel behaves toward its neighbors the way America does to the world, waving an ideological banner of repression and force that gives courage, reinforcement, consolation, and legitimacy to America doing the same thing. Mossad’s skill at assassination is the envy of Washington, creating a pathway for CIA and Special Ops to act similarly; likewise, raising “collateral damage” to a high art through terrorizing civilian populations (for the US, drone warfare, even beyond casualties the constant buzzing overhead, those below not knowing where and when the sudden strike) and carpet-bombing/shelling—an uncanny accuracy in Gaza for hitting UN schools serving as shelters for a large, helpless population, a back-and-forth saga of military cruelty and destruction, first, America taking the lead, then Israel, each learning from the other and all the while improving lethality and psych ops. In this light, the US needs Israel as instructor par excellence in the ways of warfare and hegemony, a shining ideological example by which to toughen up the American spirit, all of this in addition to furnishing a beacon of light in the ways of domination per se: how to treat those below (no coincidence that the Ferguson, MO., police had sent one of its officers to Israel for special training), a process of social control beginning seemingly to find disfavor in America, so that Israel’s own methods of crowd control, population displacement, and use of heavy-handed instruments of persuasion undoubtedly have provided a boost, a sense of psychological well-being, to those beginning to lose confidence in the majesty of force.

America has been on that slippery slope before, scorched-earth policies and programs in Vietnam perhaps compensating in full to Israelis, a quid pro quo of brutality, for the lessons they have taught, evening the scale of indebtedness so that both could proceed in friendly competition to determine who best is the practitioner of violence, each thereby giving latitude to the other in filling out the grounds of permissible torture and deprivation. How doubt, even for a moment, the benefits of such an alliance, except that each simultaneously is in pursuit of its own agenda. Although Obama and Netanyahu may be interchangeable, as for political slickness raised to the highest power (Bush and Sharon, for example, still prekindergarten by comparison), their levels of operational activity give the nod to Obama in the scope of genocide each can reasonably be expected to pursue and achieve. Presently, Israel is America in microcosm, content to create absolute devastation in

Gaza (actually, not content, until every house is leveled, ditto, hospitals, infrastructure—the land vacated and rendered uninhabitable, the people, made to suffer), and America, Israel in magnification, content to bully its way back into unilateral domination of the world system, if need be, at the risk of war with Russia, China, or both, a risk that could see the planet returned to the beginning of time via nuclear annihilation.

That there is increasingly less reticence about extermination, Gaza, serving as a focal point, an emblem of human cowardice and cruelty, few in the world coming to the defense of its people, and with that as precedent for the future, America and Israel may enjoy still closer relations, vibrating as one, until the Awakening occurs, if it ever will, and social justice trumps domination. But today, nothing of the kind. I have before me Jodi Rudoren's New York Times article, "In Torn Gaza, if Roof Stands, It's Now Home," (Aug. 18), which must be read with an understanding of how much America has aided Israel across the board, and here, where extermination, although not complete, has already left its dirty hands and choke hold of genocide. Her first sentence says it all: "Telltale signs of the displaced are everywhere in Gaza." No running water, electricity; people crowded into tiny spaces, i.e., where roofs stand, and many, where they do not, 10-13 to a room. She reports: "Scores of families have hung sheets and scarves from every available tree and pole to create shady spaces on the grounds of Al Shifa Hospital; in the unauthorized camp, a 3-month-old slept one recent morning in a wire crib lined with cardboard." "On Sunday [the 17th]," she continues, "more than 235,000 people were still crammed into 81 of the United Nations' 156 schools, where classes are supposed to start next Sunday." No chance of that. (As I wrote previously, these UN schools/shelters appear to be favorite targets of Israeli land, sea, and air power, with civilian casualties running high.) One mother of eight, Alia Kamal Elaf, stated, "Our fate at the end will be in the street." Perhaps terms such as "extermination" and "genocide" should be applied to the living as well, when life itself becomes a living death.

No showers. Already the UN "is placing a nurse and health educator at each site in the hope of staving off outbreaks of meningitis, lice and scabies.... People at the schools complain of incessant flies and fetid bathrooms." Elaf said, "she has but one mattress for her eight children, ages 8 to 16." On the grounds of Shifa Hospital, Rudoren writes, "[c]onditions are worse... where neither food nor water is provided to the makeshift camp that sprawls outside the internal medicine building, next to the X-ray department, between the emergency room, the morgue and the maternity ward." Abdullah Hamouda, in his tent: "Here each day equals a year." And Adel al-Goula, who "has already pitched a tent of sorts, in front of the pile of debris that used to be the home where he lived from the age of 13.... [t]he date, grape, olive, fig, walnut and lemon trees...all gone," put up a sign, "'Home of the al-Ghoula Family,'" and declared in the eloquent words of one who has seen suffering in the world, "We must rent a place, but we should still come here every day and sit here. To receive people. To tell the world: We are rooted in our land, until death."

AUGUST 22, 2014

### **Race, Religion and the Denial of Class**

Tribalism, strong in-group loyalty (Webster), as in today's manifestation, the response of the black and Jewish communities respectively to events in Ferguson and the Gaza Strip, reveals the solipsistic, myopic self-regarded mindset, beyond these communities to America and its

policymakers as well, in the face of repression, destruction of lives and aspirations, not least, militarism and the glorification of power. The response has been deliberately rendered inadequate, first, by the historical development of institutions, largely capitalist in origins and formation, to ensure the pacification of dissent, and second, within these communities (and indeed any other distinctive communities in America) an internalization of boundaries as the condition of membership in the society. America in the name of freedom and democracy negates both whenever political consciousness threatens to awaken or drift out of line. Its societal mechanisms to that end need not involve or be explained by conspiracy theory. In this case, the wheels of patriotism grind smoothly, patriotism a function of the ongoing consolidation of class-rule. Wealth-concentration, the economic hegemony of corporations and banking over the political state, a bred-in-the-bone system of education (broadly construed, to include the mass dissemination of acceptable themes via the media) inculcating values of individualism, pointedly abstracted from the societal welfare and its promotion, and group solidarity, equally abstracted from a generalized identity of class as the transcendent reality beyond the more limited identity, made to feel more compelling and heartfelt, of race and religion, all are instrumental and culturally-ideologically reinforced in engendering submission to authority and the devotion to the status quo (the resultant structural arrangement and political-economic distribution of power).

Behemoth is not a Kafkaesque figment of anyone's imagination. It is America as it functions in real time. It is a society which must necessarily discourage critical awareness in its people as a proposition over the long term, lest it expose the lies, distortions, betrayals of public trust required for its stabilization and its mal-distribution of wealth and power to succeed largely unchallenged. Why the difficulty, or rather the effort to make the contradiction between professions of democracy and actual gross inequalities work? The answer lies in the question; there is no contradiction, "democracy" in America, pace Tocqueville, is predicated on its negation, repudiation, demolition—never let on, of course, and swaddled in clothes of military triumph, patriotism, the Panglossian doctrine of capitalism as the best of all possible worlds, with rewards to all, provided they are deserving, presumably work hard, and keep their mouths shut. For help on the last-mentioned, a growing ratifying condition for "democracy" to operate, USG provides for unprecedented massive surveillance as the perfect complement to what presently enlists consensus and the abrogation of class feeling: war, intervention, major confrontations, for purposes of unilateral global dominance, and not to be ruled out, effective distractions from domestic problems partly created by outsized military appropriations.

There is no Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, or A. Philip Randolph among today's black leadership, neither is there Dr. King to mount the essential two-pronged attack on the American structure of class rulership and widespread poverty, directed against war and militarism, and, at his death, embarked on the Poor People's Campaign at home, both fraught with meaning for the liberation of class consciousness beyond the confines of race. Ferguson. Militarization of the police (at least a good start, yet not questioning the comprehensive militarization of the total society), opposition to discrimination and police brutality, met by demonstrators encountering life-threatening force, but ripe for manipulation and the suffocation of dissent as AG Holder comes on the scene and Obama expresses tepid indignation from the White House. Sadly, what is termed "racial solidarity" will ultimately prevail, a black POTUS and Attorney General who, by reasons of race, therefore cannot be criticized even though both, in objective terms, can and should be designated by the admittedly harsh words, "race-traitors." Holder has like most of his predecessors

used DOJ as a protective shield for the corporate and financial sectors. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, what criminal prosecutions? In the ever-increasing concentration of wealth in all key sectors of the American economy, what anti-trust prosecutions? But also germane, contemptuous disregard for the rule of law itself, as in denying habeas corpus rights to detainees (let alone, not calling for the closing of Guantanamo), prosecuting cases against whistleblowers under the Espionage Act, sitting on his hands through the many drone assassinations, and allowing to stand opinions of the Office of Legal Counsel (whether in DOJ or the Executive, still a legal expression for the legitimization of acts of torture and violations of international law), Holder, like his boss, the archetypal servant of power, wealth, the wealthy, all in the line of duty, as blacks meanwhile are urged to be docile and confined within their racial consciousness. Obama merely is Holder on a wider stage, capable of inflicting more harm on the world and, as willing symbol, silencing blacks from breaking out to question the sources of brutality, discrimination, unemployment.

The Jewish community is still more ideologically impoverished. One does not have to surrender one's religious identity as Jewish to deplore the systematic murder and destruction conducted by Israel in Gaza, just as one does not have to surrender one's racial identity as black to deplore the war, militarism, and capitalism, in particular, the latter, to account for obvious social deprivations disproportionately affecting blacks as members of the community of the poor. Breaking out of one political-ideological reference frame to see arrogance, pillage, domination, executed in the name of religious identity, or in the other, a reference frame historically assaulted from slavery to the present to engender acquiescence in subordinate rights of citizenship, to see accommodation to crumbs from the table of wealth urged by its own leaders in the name of racial identity, necessitates overcoming a tyrannous false consciousness intended in both cases to prevent the fuller identity with social humanity. For if that were to happen, authoritarian systems of every description would be shaken at their foundations.

Specifically, racial solidarity (here excusing Obama's despisement of working people, objectively seen in his policy-favoritism toward corporate wealth) contributes to racial identity, in turn, racial consciousness as self-imposed obfuscation in the rectification of fundamental abuse; similarly, religious solidarity (here excusing Netanyahu's despisement of Palestinians, no, the whole Arab-Moslem world, objectively seen in his demonization of any leaders not compliant with Israel's wishes and conduct) contributes to the same psychological dynamics, religious solidarity to religious identity, in turn, religious consciousness as obfuscation of the genocidal behavior toward others. The self-proclaimed Jewish State militates against all criticism, the Jewish outsider demeaned and designated as the self-hating Jew, so familiar now in the current political discourse as though to stampede the entire Jewish community into obedience—if not already disposed in that way. Solution? I have none. I can only point out the magnificent camaraderie between black and Jewish radicals/activists in the first two-thirds of the preceding century, fighting together each other's battles, moving toward a biracial definition of class to surmount the oppression of the common enemy, capitalism, dependent for its continued enrichment on keeping real and potential allies-in-struggle separable and apart (as now in microcosm Israel keeps the PA and Hamas apart).



AUGUST 25, 2014

## **Environmental Democracy**

Radicalism has many facets, the political-economic-ideological struggle to achieve social change, itself, then, an agency for the democratization of social structure and cultural values, being for me the primary one (and for others, no doubt other areas worthy of action and emphasis), but it is also something else—and to its credit, testifying to its vitality and openness—for radicalism is a journey of discovery, and for the individual, both self-discovery and a potential for the fuller affirmation of humanity. For me, radicalism turned on political economy as central to the foundations of societal welfare, a seemingly inclusive framework of systemic analysis and the basis for social protest. The view is familiar, 19<sup>th</sup> century Marxism, with or without the inclusion of revolutionary violence (and in America, largely without). All else purportedly was extra, incidental, perhaps even distractive. Labor strikes trumped sexual orientation, attacks on corporate wealth trumped cultural politics of gender equality, opposition to imperialism trumped liberation of a drug culture, and so a gap between generations, ultimately, a gap between CLASS and the rights and preferences of INDIVIDUALS, still within radicalism, began to widen, to the point that issues treating wealth, power, and social upheaval were becoming phased out in favor of personal emancipation and a non-class, perhaps anti-class, orientation.

To an old-style radical, radicalism in America was losing its ideological fighting edge, as though protest had entered the realm of touchy-feely politics and demands. Until recently, that was my feeling—and, insensitive as it sounds, still is. The one exception, which on close inspection was obviously deserving of inclusion, was RACE, not only on humane grounds or to form livelier coalitions, but because race could best be apprehended through the political-structural dynamics of class exploitation. (Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Race, Caste, and Class*, after many years still repays reading.) “Class” and “exploitation,” factors which are critical to the formation of a racial system, are incorporated into the analysis—and reality—of radicalism, so that for a traditional radical matters related to racial solidarity primarily or alone appear tangential if not frivolous. Racial solidarity is antithetical to radical political consciousness, as when now blacks remain loyal to Obama despite his antidemocratic record of war, intervention, assassination, corporate favoritism, deregulation, the concentration of wealth, income, and power, unemployment, in sum, a class system harmful to working people and the community of the poor, disproportionately, on both counts (and in the larger picture, broad-gauge militarism and business dominance at the expense of a vital social safety net), affecting and penalizing blacks. Yet factors other than race, termed cultural issues, possess insufficient class specificity, however important to individuals and at odds with societal democratization (e.g., punitive attitudes toward abortion and same-sex marriage), and hence are, for radicalism in its systemic mode of fundamental change, thought to have trivialized its significance and made it ripe for co-optation.

What has changed is a questioning of the finitude of radicalism. I may be dragged screaming into the modern era, and still reject manifestly non-class social-cultural phenomena as a distraction from class warfare as practiced by upper groups against the working (and unemployed) poor, but on one recent morning came an awakening, literally, at 5 a.m., with the phrase “environmental democracy” as the departure point for a left-analysis of social structure. My interest was not in cosmic questions such as climate change, though obviously determinative of the fate of the earth in the long term, but rather the politicization of the environment in its actual but often hidden class dimension of power

(thus bringing it within the province of radicalism as subject to criticism and transformation). Yes, the environment (long- and short-term in its effects) states a class-relation, whether one speaks of biotechnology, fracking, plantation agriculture, heedless extraction of natural resources, engrossment of vast tracts of land, economic development as fool's gold and rationale for every kind of spoliation, and privatization as the granddaddy of the systematic abuses of the environment—all in all a curse of world civilization.

The environment spells out a class-relation; it also represents the arena for practicing counterrevolution through exercising dominance over subject populations. US defined and enforced globalization starts from preserving and expanding a two-tiered world structure based on a pliant indigenous labor force, ready entrance for and protection of American capital investment in extractive industries, agricultural production, and a controlled setting for industrial outsourcing, together effected through manipulation of the terms of trade to ensure the “host” country's economic backwardness. Pressures on the captive nation(s) are unrelenting, the IMF and World Bank, as always, solicitous of the interests of capitalism in all its forms, to the consequent destruction of the environment. (Joyce Nelson's CP article, “Monsanto and Ukraine,” Aug. 22-24, implies US-EU encouragement of biotechnology is partly responsible for the crisis with Russia and East-West confrontation.) The environment increasingly bears the brunt and is the coveted object of international politics, conservation per se anathema to the conquistador/profit-seeker mental set.

Climate change is viewed as a distant nightmare—if viewed at all, polluters the world over, transcending ideological systems, contemptuous of restraints on their activities. Industrialization, in this case, erases or subsumes ideological differences between capitalism and socialism in the name of modernization, to the detriment of their peoples and the environment on which each fastens. (Also CP, same date, Robert Hunziker's article, “The Current State of the Planet,” is a sobering discussion of global warming.) What radicalism must do, then, is break the traditional mold in defining class issues, proposing an alternative path to societal development which treats Nature as one would fellow humans, with love, compassion, respect, and in doing so, identify privatization as one would a child molester, corrupting the well-springs of that which dignifies human existence: an innocence, freshness, capacity for wonderment, engendered in the beauty that lies outside the self, and gazing upon enables one to understand the self better. One cannot despoil the environment and pretend to professions of democracy.

This is why the collective appropriation/stewardship of Nature is inceptively socialist or radical. Here I make no distinction between them because the environment, even granting modest private property, can inculcate in one through selfless attachment and respect an attitude toward life as the fusion of Nature and Humanity which wholly contradicts privatization as the kernel of exploitation, xenophobia, war itself. (Louis Proyect's CP article, “Gunning for Vandana Shiva,” same date, makes the case for the social ownership of the environment, a collective dimension militating against the uses of biotechnology in agriculture because stewardship rather than profit is a motivating force.) The environment is not an abstraction divorced from capitalist investment, hierarchical labor relations, the world of exploitation; beginning with that realization, perhaps it can be returned to life-giving sustenance—to itself as well.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2014

## **Putin on the Ritz**

Forgive the word-play; colossal demonization notwithstanding, I'll go with Putin and Russia over Obama, the US, Rasmussen, Cameron, friends and allies everywhere. America has an unerring nose for smelling Fascism and quickly joining ranks. Today Putin used the political "F" word correctly, and for that I honor him. Consider, for example, Stephen F. Cohen's article in *The Nation*, "The Silence of American Hawks About Kiev's Atrocities," (June 30, updated July 7), time enough for Obama, Rice, Power, Biden, Rhodes, Brennan, the whole War Cabinet/National Security Advisors to absorb its contents—known anyway if also suppressed by the military and intelligence communities as disclosures to the general public—before charging Russia with the Invasion of a Sovereign State. The holier than thou attitude is breathtakingly absurd and laughable, as though America was the exemplar of international justice, rather than chief sponsor of a coup which precipitated the current crisis. And yes, today the Ukrainian prime minister has made formal request for admission into NATO, a pro forma move because NATO forces, the major purpose behind the coup, would in any case be positioned on the Russian border.

Cohen is not Thomas Friedman or Peter Baker (among *The Times*' Swiss Guards of the Vested Interests, as Veblen would have it) but a distinguished scholar of the region, whom we all may take seriously. He writes: "For weeks, the US-backed regime in Kiev has been committing atrocities against its own citizens in southeastern Ukraine, regions heavily populated by Russian-speaking Ukrainians and ethnic Russians. While victimizing a growing number of innocent people, including children, and degrading America's reputation, these military assaults on cities, captured on video, are generating pressure in Russia on President Vladimir Putin to 'save our compatriots.' Both the atrocities and the pressure on Putin have increased even more since July 1, when Kiev, after a brief cease-fire, INTENSIFIED ITS ARTILLERY AND AIR ATTACKS ON EASTERN CITIES DEFENSELESS AGAINST SUCH WEAPONS." (Emphasis, mine) I stress the timing, two months ago, because the situation has only gotten worse.

Given the administration's "silence interrupted only by occasional statements excusing and thus encouraging more atrocities by Kiev," Cohen adds, this "shameful complicity" marks "the worst US-Russian confrontation in decades." One can "honorably disagree about the causes and resolution" of the crisis, "but not about deeds that are rising to the level of war crimes, if they have not already done so." As early as mid-April the Kiev government declared an "anti-terrorist operation" as rationale for wiping out political-social protest in southeastern Ukraine. Cohen: "Considering those preceding events [protesters mimicking "the initial Maidan protests in Kiev in 2013," such as occupying official buildings], but above all the country's profound historical divisions, particularly between the western and eastern regions—ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, economic and political—the rebellion in the southeast... was not surprising. Nor were the protests against the unconstitutional way (in effect, a coup) the new government had come to power, the southeast's sudden loss of effective political representation in the capital and the real prospect of official discrimination. But by declaring an 'anti-terrorist operation' against the new protesters, Kiev signaled its intention to 'destroy' them, not negotiate with them."

He describes the May 2 Odessa massacre (no other word will do), in which "[a]n organized pro-Kiev mob chased protesters into a building, set it on fire and tried to block the exits. Some forty people, perhaps many more, perished in the flames or were murdered as they fled the inferno." As

Cohen notes, this “awaken[ed] memories of Nazi German extermination squads in Ukraine and other Soviet republics during World War II.” Is Kiev the Nazification of Ukraine? US supporters of the government flatly deny that. (When I had earlier commented in *The Times* on the Odessa tragedy and on Rightist elements in the Kiev government, readers were quick to reply that not everyone was like this—something Cohen himself points out when stating that the “parliamentary majority are aspiring European-style democrats or moderate nationalists.”) Yet fascist groups, as is, or should be, well known, were key elements in the new government. Cohen continues: “Members of the infamous Right Sector, a far-right paramilitary organization ideologically aligned with the ultranationalist Svoboda party, itself a constituent part of Kiev’s coalition government, led the mob. Both are frequently characterized by knowledgeable observers as ‘neo-fascist’ movements.” This charge of Nazi-like actions, values, statements is not mere fairy tale; even the symbols prominently displayed (as well as on the Odessa building) resembled the swastika.

We are now at the end of August. The “anti-terrorist operation” has been going on since early May, the totality of repression swept under the rug by the USG and a fawning national media, a rug with bulges high enough to hide “armored personnel carriers, tanks, artillery, helicopter gunships and warplanes,” directed to southeastern cities—the list includes Mariupol, scene of today’s fighting, and many others, including Donetsk and Luhansk—large sections of which have been reduced to rubble. And when local police proved unreliable, “Kiev hastily mobilized Right Sector and other radical nationalist militias,” who, along with a National Guard, “escalated the ethnic warfare and killing of innocent civilians.” The “anti-terrorist” campaign moved from “rebel checkpoints on the outskirts of cities,” to systematic destruction via artillery attacks on city centers, including “residential buildings, shopping malls, parks, schools, kindergartens and hospitals,” so that “[m]ore and more urban areas, neighboring towns and even villages now look and sound like war zones, with telltale rubble, destroyed and pockmarked buildings, mangled vehicles, the dead and wounded in streets, wailing mourners and crying children.”

Enough! I’m sick of using that term when describing atrocities, the grimness of the scene with us here but also practically word-for-word in the Israeli invasion of Gaza, as though a universalized fascist modus operandi defines a new era in world history, in this case, for both, with the generosity and support of the US and complicity or pattern of evasion of the West in general. I honor Putin because there are few leaders today who stand up to Fascism as a world trend. In the case of Ukraine (statements that can be easily duplicated, with a change of referent, in Israel’s political leadership) we see, from Right Sector and Svoboda, the following (again, Cohen): “Both movements glorify Ukraine’s murderous Nazi collaborators in World War II as inspirational ancestors. Both, to quote Svoboda’s leader Oleh Tyahnybok, call for an ethnically pure nation purged of the ‘Moscow-Jewish mafia’ and ‘other scum,’ including homosexuals, feminists and political leftists. And both hailed the Odessa massacre.” For Dmytro Yarosh, leader of Right Sector, it was “another bright day in our national history.” A Svoboda deputy leader: “Bravo, Odessa.... Let the Devils burn in hell.”

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The equation of Putin with Hitler—Hillary is not alone in America in making the accusation—opens a can of psychological worms, at the very least a projection onto another of precisely the war crimes of which we are guilty and whose suppression from memory and understanding is critical to our self-image as a nation, lest the whole bottomless well of militarism, intervention, torture,

support of dictatorship, squandering of the national wealth to appease a numerically small elite while ensuring a sabotaging of the social welfare, continues unimpeded. Putin's brother was killed and his father wounded in the war against the Nazis; American officials, from Obama to Nuland and McCain, just to name three in the news connected with buttressing the Kiev government, are in process of rehabilitating the horrific experience of times past perhaps now under the more engaging label of liberal humanitarianism. Better get used to it! America has entered a downward curve into the ideological swamp of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, counterterrorism as the catch-all for the destruction of, not simply radicalism, but independent critical judgment. Our boy, Arseniy Yatsenuk, Ukraine's PM, refers to protesters as "subhumans," we hear in Israel the same for Palestinians; when will our political-military-economic leadership admit to the same view for whomever crosses their path?

The Guardian (Aug. 29) captures the growing sense of tension between America (the EU largely by its side) and Russia over Ukraine in an article by Shaun Walker, Leonid Ragozin, and Matthew Weaver, "Putin likens Ukraine's forces to Nazis and threatens standoff in the Arctic," in which "[h]ours after Barack Obama accused Russia of sending troops into Ukraine and fuelling an upsurge in the separatist war, Putin retorted that the Ukrainian army was the villain of the piece, targeting residential areas of towns and cities like German troops did in the former Soviet Union." I'm somewhat surprised by the Guardian's tone, not only accepting the view that Russia has invaded the area (despite using "alleged"), but also a muted disparagement of Putin. The NATO meeting (same date), secretary general Rasmussen issuing a strong statement about an illegal border crossing, appeared orchestrated to coincide with the convening of Obama's national security council meeting the previous day and news conference which featured even stronger language: "Russia has deliberately and repeatedly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine...." Putin's response: "It is necessary to force the Ukrainian authorities to substantively begin these talks—not on technical issues... the talks must be substantive. Small villages and large cities [are] surrounded by the Ukrainian army, which is directly hitting residential areas with the aim of destroying the infrastructure... It sadly reminds me the events of the second world war, when German fascist... occupants surrounded our cities." These two days (Aug. 28-29) have seen a UN security council meeting, the British repeating the NATO charges, then the US State Department charge of major military involvement, and finally US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, "It [Russia] has outright lied. In these acts... we see Russia's actions for what they are: a deliberate effort to support, and now fight alongside, illegal separatists in another sovereign country." Not a word on what I termed the Nazification of Ukraine, nor the atrocities committed by Ukrainian forces.

We are all indebted to the New York Times for stoking the fires of war, its editorial "Mr. Putin Tests the West in Ukraine" (Aug. 29) a remarkable display of one-sidedness (implied by us vs. them in the title). It states that "President Obama was right in his news conference on Thursday to rule out military action, but new, tougher Western economic sanctions are obviously needed to make clear to President Vladimir Putin of Russia that the West views HIS LIES AND ESCALATING AGGRESSION AS A MAJOR THREAT." (Emphasis, mine) How long military action will be ruled out, is another question. The Times referred to his comments as "relatively restrained," and the address at the UN by Power as "more blunt," praising it as that which "should be the reality guiding Mr. Obama when he meets with NATO allies in Wales next week." The editorial describes Russia's motivation as gaining "effective control of Ukraine's industrial heartland," then goes on to

say: “But Russia’s motive is not the issue here. It is Russia’s violation of a cardinal principle of the international order since World War II—states do not seize territory by force.”

Of course, absolutely right. Several years ago the famous article of Gallagher and Robinson on “The Imperialism of Free Trade” made clear that territory per se was passé, that instead intervention and war, as practiced by the US, concerned, beyond generalized market penetration, spheres of influence holding geopolitical and geostrategic potential, and counting on both hands from World War II the number of invasions through Iraq and Afghanistan, and using an adding machine to tabulate the much larger number of American military bases worldwide, one can see that there has been force aplenty yet not for territory in its own right. Still riding Putin, as playing “his dangerous game in Ukraine with cunning and deceit,” The Times does all it can as international cheerleader in containing and isolating him and Russia: “Comments from European leaders on Thursday [the 28<sup>th</sup>] showed they recognize the danger of this moment. European Union leaders meeting on Saturday must join the United States in expanding the economic sanctions.... And when NATO leaders gather next week, they should give strong reassurances to NATO members along Russia’s borders that they will be protected should Moscow turn its attention on them.” The Soviet bear is hungry and obviously wants to gobble up nations. Or so NYT insinuates.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

I commend The Times on its intellectual honesty. Here it is unabashedly given to warmongering. For some time, inexplicably, it has been egging on Obama, raising the prospect of World War 3. Its contempt for Putin and Russia appears without limit, just as is its myopic view of US foreign policy, as though interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan never happened.

As the presumed gold standard for journalism, it yet cozies up to Obama, who conducts the greatest surveillance system on the American public in US history. Since the days of A.O.S. and Reston, it has become pathetic, soldiering on behalf of a crypto-fascist administration whose militarism is only if at all exceeded by its contempt for civil liberties and its devotion to wealth concentration and deregulation. Someday, even The Times will feel the pinch, because authoritarianism is a cumulative wave rolling over everything in sight. One false step and even The Times will not be immune.

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The situation is heating up as I write. With near-geometric purity one can say: Ukraine is to its southeast part what Israel is to Gaza, indiscriminate shelling and destruction being intended to crush the will of the people. Rubble everywhere, Luhansk and Donetsk interchangeable with Jabaliya and Beit Hanoun in the authoritarian heavy-handed demand for submission, America in support of both governments’ missions. The Times’ reporters, Neil MacFarquar and Andrew Kramer, shed further light on the growing conflict in their article, “Praising Rebels, Putin Toughens Tone on Ukraine,” (Aug. 30), in which Putin finally speaks the language of power Obama and the EU/NATO leadership understand. Whether this has any effect on their actions and judgment is another matter. The reporters adopt the NYT party line, “Russian-backed rebels” standard journalistic procedure as introduction to Putin, who “bluntly strengthened Moscow’s hard-line position that the government in Kiev must be compelled to negotiate regional autonomy,” a position, however, hardly one of annexation. Insinuation plays a large role in the Ukraine analysis, and for Obama and his

beribboned ally Rasmussen of NATO, the scarier the picture the tighter the sanctions and matching expressions of insolent hatred. (So much for Obama's "cool," when he describes Putin as a liar and Russia as an aggressor.) From my vantage point, it is none too soon that Putin should declare his resistance to American hegemony on the Continent and the West's (under US leadership) effort to isolate Russia in the world community. Even the reporters recognize a possible sea-change in progress: "Abandoning his more frequent conciliatory stance, Mr. Putin issued a rare, open, congratulatory message to the insurgents. They had 'achieved a major success in intercepting Kiev's military operation,' he said on his website."

Here The Times makes reference to (anonymous) experts, necessary to guiding the discussion on lines favorable to Washington: "Behind the message, and the wider military operation, analysts saw several Kremlin goals." (The looming shadow of Stalin.) All three mentioned suppose Russian aggrandizement, to which a military response logically or ideologically follows: a) "weaken [Ukraine's] central government authority and ensure that the country cannot escape Moscow's orbit—and certainly never join NATO or other important Western alliances"; b) reinforce "the increasingly beleaguered rebel forces in Luhansk and Donetsk, which were at risk of capture by government forces, hence robbing Moscow of important leverage"; and c) try "to establish a land route to Crimea." Not bad for Pentagon, CIA, and think-tank analysts, yet none of the enumerated points of critical importance to Russia's security, and that Putin cannot counter through means other than intervention and/or invasion. As I noted, NATO will get to Russia's borders whether or not Yatsenuk's overture to join NATO and the EU is taken up. Kiev bears watching, whether or not it stays nonaligned, and whether or not in Russia's orbit. (Frankly, without de-Nazification, it will always, once beyond the Southeast, remain so.) As for so-called "rebel forces," Putin's emphasis on Kiev's refusal of substantive negotiations (a federal structure affording language and other rights) must be faced whatever the conditions on the ground. If Putin wanted to, the battle tide would quickly turn in Donetsk and everywhere under threat. Finally, "a land route to Crimea" is hardly worth risking World War Three, except, if tried, which is improbable, the US might well seize the opportunity for an Armageddon-type showdown, vainly seeking to recoup its World Empire.

Putin must be scratching his head about what next. For the reporters, the putative arch-villain did what was otherwise unexplainable: "In one conciliatory gesture, Mr. Putin suggested in his statement that the militia groups open a humanitarian corridor to allow surrounded Ukrainian soldiers to escape and to avoid further loss of life." (The rebel leader, Zakharchenko, agreed, provided the Ukrainians abandon their weapons.) However, "Ukraine rejected [Putin's] proposal and said no such corridors had been established."

My New York Times Comment to the MacFarquar-Kramer article, Aug. 30, also follows:

Quotations from Putin's education forum fail to mention the significant point, his accusation (correct, I believe) that the Ukrainian government is fascist in ancestry, word, and deed. That Russia wants to prevent Ukraine from becoming part of the West's orbit, is only partially true. It would be a relief to let EU and NATO welcome Ukraine as befitting the West's own animus toward Russia. Clear the air. Except for one thing: no NATO presence on Russia's borders.

Ukraine resembles the Spanish Civil War: a dress rehearsal for global Fascism. The rubble, the indiscriminate bombings of cities, towns, villages—here Putin in his statements is 100% accurate—is a black day for international law and peace.

The US applauds the Kiev government, and looks the other way as Right Sector and Svoboda exercise disproportionate influence on Kiev's conduct and decisions. Putin stands alone among world leaders to oppose the spread of Fascism. For that, the US demonizes him. Obama, despite pre-election smoothness, will no doubt find the means for intervention. Kiev is our blood brother, as Victoria Nuland and John McCain made clear. Freedom Fighters to the barricades! Put the Russkies in their place!

SEPTEMBER 2, 2014

### **Ferguson as Democratic Life Preserver**

Liberals' manipulation of history and symbols to cover retrograde social policies of war, intervention, wealth concentration, deregulation, the whole Corporatist mile of impendent Fascism, is evident in every unprincipled move they, specifically here, the Democratic party, take, whether as the militaristic fundamentals of global hegemony or the anti-civil-liberties foundation of massive domestic surveillance, to keep in power for self-serving reasons, but also, through ideological commitment, to serve capitalism and its ruling elites in America. This somewhat despicable political record, in full swing since the end of World War II, has dressed an international posture of counterrevolution with the symbolism of freedom (the Free World, America the chief architect) and a national posture of wealth concentration and class differentiation with the symbolism of the social welfare (presumed allegiance to working people). How low, though, can the party stoop? Apparently, whatever it takes, as now, the political manipulation of Ferguson to get blacks nationwide to turn out for the mid-term elections.

Whatever his predecessor has done, Obama has upped the ante, whether armed drone strikes for the purpose of targeted assassination or, in some ways analogous and vitally important as—until now—a hidden issue at home, the MILITARIZATION of the police, local, county, state, assorted other units, from Homeland Security to Highway Patrols, analogous, then, in demonstrating contempt for, and in practice, violation of, the rule of law, and raising the temperature of “law enforcement” to a pitch of insensitivity so as to make killing easier. AG Holder comes to Ferguson with unctuous platitudes while POTUS cranks the larger war machine enabling the Pentagon to disgorge some of its surplus weaponry and thereby keep military appropriations at threshold levels (while sending \$225M to Israel to replenish its arms in the destruction of Gaza). To speak of racial justice in Ferguson while women and children are daily murdered worldwide, frequently through American connivance, if not direct responsibility, reeks with a politicized (i.e., contrived) schizophrenia that allows for the mental coexistence of outright subjugation of others, including blacks at home, and the soothing rhetoric of helpfulness and humanitarianism which glosses its practice.

Race is obviously a seminal social category. In America, it produced chattel slavery, then segregation, a continuity of oppression, discrimination, inequality, a structural dichotomization carrying the cultural-ideological-political-economic conditions of domination and subordination defining a power relationship in which racism per se provides advantages to ruling groups in



creating an underclass deemed inferior for ultimate control over the labor market and the distribution of wealth. What can be done to blacks affects the white working class while keeping the two apart on artificial grounds of supposed differences in aspiration and ability. A neat trick, the use of race to stabilize wealth and the wealthy; only now, we see an upper segment of the black community turning against its own people—and all working people: a strategic sector admitted into ruling circles on the promise of good behavior, keeping the corporatist ship afloat and militarism prospering and fully active, while—and this is important—neutralizing if not completely negating all dissent from within the community (the theme of racial solidarity) and potential social forces of protest and opposition including but moving in wider circles beyond blacks, to radicals, antiwar activists, advocates for civil liberties and gender liberation, the rock-the-boat crew threatening to sink the corporatist ship and its military escort.

Simply, Obama is a racial symbol whose function is to eviscerate the democratic possibilities inhering in racial justice, meanwhile deceiving most blacks and white liberals alike whose blindness has been drilled into them through America's systemic institutionalizing of false consciousness into all social strata below the top—a tried-and-true political absolute to forestall the consequences of a genuine democratization of the class system, in which case, racism, too, along with generalized exploitation, would topple or be severely weakened. Precisely because race has been vulgarized, transmogrified, diverted into channels of oppression and repression, that blacks themselves can be appealed to, against their class interests as the poor, the underprivileged, the cement for society-wide labor degradation, on the grounds of racial solidarity, and therefore renew the bonds of their immiseration. Race becomes self-castration by the obfuscation of class as the personal locus of one's identity and power; not that race is negligible, but that only integrated with class does it fulfill the promise of liberation, otherwise being a crutch for separation from similarly disposed individuals of another race, and hence, easily conquered, made tractable, for purposes far removed from the objective determination of one's well-being.

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Let's get down to cases. Because Obama is black, blacks must therefore vote black, i.e., Obama's party, the Democrats. Could anything be crasser, racial solidarity appealed to with no mention of policies and record, conferring stereotypic absolutism as a form of depersonalizing life experiences and intelligence as requisite to unquestioning party devotion? In religious discourse, leader and party would be subject to the charge of idolatry; in Marxian terms, false consciousness to opportunistic ends. Blacks as political merchandise, sadly, a state of mind and condition to which blacks have increasingly acquiesced. It is no wonder we see the glaring difference in context and leadership between Dr. King, who combined an antiwar stance of principled pacifism with what I take to be its domestic correlate, support for the Poor People's campaign, integrated structurally as a nation forswearing hegemony for realizing equality and societal democratization at home, and Barack Obama, who represents the direct opposite, intervention, war, drone assassination, and a policy of business/financial/investment deregulation that precludes all forms of equality, including racial. This current effort of electoral mobilization, led by John Lewis, who knew better and braver days as a civil rights activist, and early days in Congress, and the Congressional Black Caucus, the Democratic Senatorial Committee discreetly behind, is, in practice, blindsiding blacks into abject party discipline to a party undeserving of respect, whose chief merit as the lesser of two evils collapses on close inspection when basics of war, surveillance, unemployment, are raised.

Jonathan Martin's New York Times article, "At Risk in Senate, Democrats Seek to Rally Blacks," (Aug. 31), helps us to see the cynicism of the move, although he does not say as much. What he does bring out is that the Democrats are desperate. The midterms will not change the complexion of the House, the Senate is up for grabs and may be lost, Obama's ratings are at 40%, and, ludicrous in the extreme, the country is moving still further to the Right, so that Democrats in closely contested states are seeking distance from him—as too radical. And it is this that blacks are asked to swallow, naturally sugar-coated in a resounding chorus of, yes, racial solidarity. Martin writes: "With their Senate majority imperiled, Democrats are trying to mobilize African-Americans outraged by the shooting in Ferguson, Mo., to help them retain control of at least one chamber of Congress for President Obama's final two years in office."

Ferguson, to change the subject (i.e., if Americans really cared) about the looming confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, the Pacific-first strategy to surround and isolate China (again, confrontation), the encouragement of Israel in Gaza and beyond, continued exploitation and spoliation of the environment, the list is long and no point in going further, the Democrats having nothing positive to show now turn to Ferguson for electoral leverage shedding crocodile tears over Michael Brown's death while duplicating it in hundreds as standard administration policy (and standard of those whose arms it supplies elsewhere). Martin continues: "In black churches and on black talk radio, African-American civic leaders have begun invoking the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, along with conservative calls to impeach Mr. Obama, as they urge black voters to channel their anger by voting Democratic in the midterm elections, in which minority turnout is typically lower." Instead of channeling their anger, one would hope that responsible leadership would call for expressing it, if, in fact, social change were wanted.

And here is Lewis: "Ferguson has made it crystal clear to the African-American community and others that we've got to go to the polls. You participate and vote, and you can have some control over what happens to your child and to your country." You can support Obama's policies, be they however imperialistically-laden and generous beyond measure to ruling groups in America. Significantly, Lewis does not question these policies—as decades ago he surely would have. No embarrassment here, even "[o]ther steps [beyond the Black Caucus and Senatorial Committee], such as recruiting N.B.A. players to help register more African-Americans, are also underway." This also means, voting for southern white senators who themselves are, notwithstanding the party label, reactionary in all areas, from foreign policy to the social safety net, relevant to blacks' future. Martin continues: "And the terrain is tricky: Many of the states where the black vote could be most crucial are also those where Mr. Obama is deeply unpopular among many white voters. So Democratic senators in places like Alabama, Louisiana and North Carolina must distance themselves from the nation's first African-American president while trying to motivate the black voters who are his most loyal constituents." Somehow, I don't feel sorry for anyone caught in this predicament, least of all the N.B.A. players.

Crassness? Rev. Al Sharpton, at the Brown funeral, used the occasion "to raise the issue of voter participation, drawing nods and loud ovations." And Mayor Kasim Reed of Atlanta, "[i]nvoking the mother of Trayon Martin, the black Florida teenager killed in 2012, and her plea for people to 'use my broken heart,'" stated on August 29 in the same vein: "The most important tribute you can make to individuals who you believe were treated unfairly is to exercise your franchise." Herded into the Democratic pen, so that the militarization of the police can remain unimpeded, and more

black youth in the US, and youth in what have become free-fire zones globally, can be blasted away.

My New York Times Comment on the Martin article, same date, follows:

Racial solidarity, as expressed by John Lewis, disgraces the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, who demanded of black leadership a transcendent vision, both antiwar and anticorporate concentrated wealth. Dr. King opposed Vietnam AND helped launch a Poor People's Campaign.

Barack Obama has disgraced the black community by his prowar/prointervention record and market fundamentalism with Rubin, Summers, and Geithner in tow. Obama has done nothing for blacks, except of course increase the disparities in wealth and power making for greater impoverishment and therefore disproportionately hurting the black community. Lewis's sterling civil rights record is in jeopardy by his absence of criticism of, indeed his shilling for, Obama, who has betrayed the trust of all reformers, white and black.

Let the Democratic party sink in its iniquity. Using Ferguson to gain votes is disgusting, opportunistic, shameful, precisely because the administration has done everything harmful to the creation of a just, peaceful, equalitarian nation and world. Black leaders should issue a wake-up call against a wealth-besotted, war-provoking elite, instead of joining the parade. I'm glad Dr. King is not here to witness the killing of his dream. Ditto W.E.B. DuBois, A. Philip Randolph, and the generation which served its people on a democratic path, rather than into the arms of Wall Street, the Pentagon, the CIA and NSA.

Would Dr. King have been guilty of massive surveillance of the American people?

SEPTEMBER 4, 2014

### **Obama's Rainbow (aka Mushroom Cloud)**

Obama in Estonia, Leader of the Free World, Commander-in-Chief of a Global Alliance against ISIS and Russia (conflated into a mélange of Anti-Communism/Counterterrorism), then on to Wales to rally the troops, all sorts of defense-intellectuals bestowing their blessings on a potentially open-ended conflict, NATO itself the willing tool of US hegemonic principle and purpose to shape the world system in its own image and to its own self-interest and advantage. That much should now be obvious. NATO from its inception has been an extension of US foreign policy, the military complement of the IMF and World Bank, while the European Union, only slightly less tractable, is a dependable source of support for the stabilization of world capitalism under American leadership, directed to the social-structural control of modernization so as to maintain a de facto colonial relationship to the Third World and the arresting of socialist and/or revolutionary currents wherever they might appear. A tall order? Hardly, for the West has come to include Japan, Israel, and in a somewhat grey area, whomever accepts American largesse in drawing the Manichean line with Russia and China, the regnant ideological dualism between Freedom and Slavery.

Things are heating up. First, to set the scene, please join with me in singing (old Leftist) E.Y. Harburg's lyrics from Finian's Rainbow, "If this isn't love, the whole world is crazy / If this isn't love, I'm daft as a daisy," except, with apologies to Yip, insert "war" for love, and perhaps rename

the musical “Obama’s Rainbow (aka Mushroom Cloud),” for, as Julie Davis and Steven Erlanger, in their New York Times article, “NATO Weighs Rapid Response Force for Eastern Europe,” (Sept. 1) write in their opening sentence: “As Ukrainian leaders warned on Monday [Sept. 1] of ‘a great war’ with Russia, NATO leaders meeting in Wales this week were expected to endorse their most concrete response yet to increased Russian military intervention in Ukraine: establishing a rapid-reaction force capable of deploying quickly to Eastern Europe, officials of the alliance said.” Talk of war is open, as is reference to NATO’s Article 5, and the felicitous phrase now current in policy circles, “the commitment to collective defense,” the term “defense” usually out of place, as witness NATO alacrity in engaging with the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, and fighting America’s proxy-wars as needed. Too, “rapid-reaction force,” like “defense” and the US Department of Defense, prejudices the case, in which “rapid-reaction” becomes, instead, aggression.

The reporters write: “The new force of some 4,000 troops, capable of moving on 48 hours’ notice, will be supported with logistics and equipment pre-positioned in Eastern European countries closer to Russia, with an upgraded schedule of military exercises and deployments that are intended to make NATO’s commitment of collective defense more credible and enhance its deterrence.” Anyone for mission creep? As for quick deployment, one would think that the prepositioning of logistics and equipment closer to Russia, along with an upgraded schedule of military exercises, would indeed hasten the pace—as well as concern Putin and Russia of US-EU-NATO’s less than peaceful intent. Finian’s Rainbow opened in New York on Jan. 10, 1947, when Cold War tensions were already running high. Now is Sept. 2, 2014, and after a seeming relaxation, sporadic at best, we are back at the same old stand, Obama the distillation of Harry Truman-JFK-Bill Clinton, the Democratic Warlord anxious to prove his patriotic mettle, as dangerous to world peace as any Republican coming down the pike. Here Davis and Erlanger show the forward momentum of the military demiurge (though as good Times’ reporters, that is not their intent—bad, bad Moscow): “The agreement [rapid-reaction force] is planned as the substantive centerpiece of the NATO meeting, which will take place Thursday and Friday [Sept. 4-5] and will be attended by President Obama, who will stop in Estonia before the summit meeting. His aides said the trip was intended to highlight the United States’ commitment to NATO, and the alliance’s determination to protect all 28 members from aggression—from Moscow or elsewhere.” Perhaps Ecuador or the South Bronx? Why disguise the pointed nature of the locus of suspicion, and why disguise NATO’s (really, the US’s) geopolitical and geostrategic ambitions and plans?

The Estonia-stop is for steeling Obama’s will, as if this were needed, for that nation hardly enjoys conjugal friendship with Russia, its PM, Taavi Roivas (whom the reporters describe as “one of Mr. Obama’s proud Estonian hosts”) rolling up his sleeves and declaring: “The summit is very important because Russia thought it can change the borders of a sovereign European country by force, and this is happening not very far from NATO’s borders. The security situation has changed, and we need to rethink our plans and reinforce our allies, so we can be 101 percent sure that all member states are equally and strongly protected.” Russia, by definition, is the Aggressor, no word of the worldwide encirclement made up of US military bases, nor interventions, nor even strategic prepositioning of its own.

The war chorus, music to Obama’s ears, is growing. Poroshenko: “Direct, unconcealed aggression [by Russia] has been launched against Ukraine from a neighboring country.” Heletey, Ukraine’s defense minister: “A great war has arrived at our doorstep, the likes of which Europe has

not seen since World War II.” As for Obama, “the trip”—they write—“is a chance to show Europeans that he is dedicated to NATO at a time when Russia is challenging the postwar European order, built on the principle of no border changes by force.” And, I’d add, a chance to show Americans he is truly one of us, dedicated to the proposition of permanent war, a climate in which the softies who want a vital social safety net and welfare sector could not possibly thrive. Then a favorite I’ve had the privilege of quoting before, Ivo Daalder, former ambassador to NATO and presently head of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs: “The tension you’re seeing between Russia and the West is going to be put on display in Wales, and the president is going to be leading that effort. [Obama] wants to reaffirm the unity and strength of the alliance.” Anticommunism is back in style, even when communism in Russia is long past. Tilting at windmills with nuclear weapons will come next to China, part of America’s globalization of Reaction and counterrevolution.

Other dependable voices—James Stavridis, NATO’s commander from 2009 to 2013, and now dean of Tuft’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy: “The really ironic aspect here is that a re-energized, restrengthened NATO is Vladimir Putin’s worst nightmare, and yet it’s his tactical actions that have done just that.” Ironic—or planned entrapment, beginning with the coup itself? In the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, NATO pledged no substantial permanent bases in Eastern Europe, to which Anders Rasmussen, NATO’s secretary general, and becoming one of my favorite hawkish voices, shrill even by NATO standards, has gotten around through troop rotations, although prepositioned assets are at-the-ready: “[Russia’s] aggressive behavior [will mean] a more visible NATO presence in the East for as long as required.” This fits perfectly with the general war setting. Davis-Erlanger write: “The moves, combined with military exercises and enhanced air patrols over the Baltic States, Poland and Romania are intended to deter Russia and reassure newer members.”

Credibility is the name of the game, always the case in the militaristic-authoritarian mindset, perhaps enshrined in Dulles’s nuclear deterrence and massive retaliation policy, operative before and since his time—here, Robin Niblett of London’s Chatham House: “This is a credibility summit. When we say we’re able to do something, we must have the political will and ability to do it.... [The summit will be measured on how] governments use it to wake up and sensitize their populations to the fact that we live in an increasingly dangerous world with real threats to our prosperity and security, and that more money must be spent.” The threat, to recall Pogo, is us; in any case, more money to an arms race of our own making. As Charles Kupchan, senior director for Europe on the National Security Council, put the Obama message to Russia: “Don’t even think about messing around in Estonia or in any of the Baltic areas in the same way that you’ve been messing around in Ukraine.” All that is needed here is for Ben Rhodes to sweeten the inflammatory language with praise of liberal humanitarianism.

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Russia, of course, is following closely events leading up to the summit. NYT reporter Andrew Roth, in his article, “Russia to Revise Military Doctrine in Response to NATO,” (Sept. 2), writes that Mikhail Popov, a senior military official, expressed concern that “changing military dangers and military threats” posed by NATO’s expansion is “one of the leading military dangers for the Russian Federation,” in that NATO’s leaders “would seek to strengthen the alliance’s long-term military presence in Eastern Europe by establishing new military bases in the region and by

deploying tanks in Estonia, a member of NATO that borders Russia.” Not wild-eyed speculation, but what Rasmussen and NATO want and presumably why Obama through his belligerent remarks about protecting all 28 NATO nations is making Estonia his first stop before the summit. (As if Ukraine weren’t trouble enough, now the spotlight shifts or makes room for Estonia as well.) Popov again, in response to NATO’s eastward thrust: ““We believe that the defining factor in our relationship with NATO remains the unacceptability for Russia of plans to move MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE ALLIANCE to our borders, including by means of expanding the bloc.”” (caps., mine) The continued emphasis on the encroaching military factor, as I read it, is meant to highlight the alternative, nonmilitary relations of trade founded on mutual respect. This would be far preferable to Putin, yet ideologically anathema to Obama and the West, given the consequent deflation of the war psychology and permanent state of readiness.

Credibility and conciliation have become polar opposites, to the US-EU-NATO complex of interests, the latter, conciliation, being construed as a sign of weakness, no, weakness as such, summoning fears of a Communist takeover presided over by the twin ghosts of Stalin and Mao—adversaries to be dredged up, to justify unlimited capitalist expansion, intervention often for its own sake, and for distractive purposes as a means of social control locking the population into the existing structure of power. Foreign Minister Lavrov pointed out that “a recent initiative by the Ukrainian government to shed its nonaligned status and to join NATO could scuttle efforts to negotiate a peace settlement between Kiev and separatists [Roth’s term following Western media practice, not mine] in southeast Ukraine.” A correct assessment, in that a peace settlement has been consistently discouraged by Kiev and, in the larger picture, would jeopardize the *raison d’être* of NATO, to contain, weaken, and perhaps ultimately dismember Russia.

Putin, envisioning for months the kind of summit at hand, stated as early as April, ““When the infrastructure of a military bloc approaches our borders, we have grounds for apprehensions and questions.”” He further recognized the narrowing of Russia’s options in light of NATO’s maneuvering: ““We wanted to support the residents of Crimea, but we also followed certain logic: If we don’t do anything, Ukraine will be drawn into NATO sometime in the future... [and] NATO ships will dock in Sevastopol, the city of Russia’s naval glory.”” Nationalistic, undeniable; but battleships, carriers, guns trained on Russian soil—who can blame him?

Coming to the present, one sees the alacrity with which Putin’s demonization gathers steam. Ian Traynor, writing in *The Guardian* for Sept. 2, quotes him, according to the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, as saying, in a telephone conversation with Jose Manuel Barrosa, outgoing president of the European Commission, “The problem is not this [the possible presence of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine], but that if I want I’ll take Kiev in two weeks.” That is, if he so gave the orders, which he did not. There was no denial; rather, that the remarks were taken out of context. Moscow thought the leak offensive. The interesting point, though, was the somewhat exaggerated response at an EU summit Aug. 30. As Traynor reports: “Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian president, attended the EU summit and painted an apocalyptic picture of the conflict, with EU leaders dropping their usual public poise in a heated debate.” Dalia Grybauskaite, Lithuania’s president, held that Russia was “at war with Europe,” while David Cameron saw this as Munich all over again, and Angela Merkel feared that Estonia and Latvia would be next. Putin, meanwhile, despite *The Times*’ talk of a “Revised Military Doctrine,” has kept his counsel, and Popov merely observed: “Nato’s planned

action... is evidence of the desire of US and Nato leaders to continue their policy of aggravating tensions with Russia.’”

Not only did Putin not order an attack on Kiev, but Lavrov, speaking for the Russian position, sought in his meeting with Moscow students precisely the path of conciliation, as seen in Shaun Walker and Dan Roberts’ article in *The Guardian*, “Russian foreign minister calls for immediate ceasefire in Ukraine,” (Sept. 1), in which uppermost was the protection of the civilian population. Lavrov: “‘They [Ukrainian forces] must leave positions from which they can harm the civilian population. I very much count on today’s negotiations being devoted above all to the task of agreeing an immediate ceasefire, without conditions.’” In contrast, I give the last word to Sen. Robert Menendez, Democrat, of New Jersey, and chair of Foreign Relations, as quoted in Neil MacFarquhar’s *NYT* article, “As Ukraine Talks Resume....” (Sept. 1), speaking at a Kiev news conference: “‘ From my perspective this is a Russian fight against Europe being fought out on Ukrainian territory.’” According to the account, “he also accused Russia of blocking attempts to find a peaceful solution.” Tell me, how does Menendez differ from McCain, who also paid homage to Kiev?

SEPTEMBER 5, 2014

### **NATO’s Tentacles Choking Ukraine**

Ernest Hemingway wannabes are all out to pasture, burrowing into rat holes of Alienation characterizing the current American mindset, rather than examining critically the culture, institutions, and values which promote a national temper of unrepentant destruction toward the great Other, i.e., whether citizens at home (massive surveillance) or countries judged hostile (for starters, Russia and China) to a US-defined and –defended world order via the military implementation of market fundamentalism and unilateral action affecting global political-structural arrangements. No social revolution wanted. No threats to capitalism tolerated (even not acceptable, capitalism presumably tainted with past associations with socialism). Instead, Americanization pure and simple: a permanent war economy and society; “friends and allies” in lockstep through suitable incentives (financial, military, and if necessary, outright pressure) in support of US foreign policy; and the usual economic paraphernalia, beginning with a comprehensive system of deregulation and removal of controls on corporate antisocial behavior; all complemented by the steady infusion of FEAR, transforming yesterday’s anticommunism into today’s counterterrorism, providing a popular mandate for USG’s continued militarism in the service of world counterrevolution.

Welcome to Newport, Wales, Sept. 4-5, 2014, an international festival showcasing the West’s hegemony vis-à-vis Russia and points beyond, orchestrated by the US with NATO fulfilling its role of spearhead for American interests and EU allowing the military tail to wag the dog. Neat, juicy, subservient, Cameron on the battlement, Hollande, abjectly capitulating to Washington, and Merkel, joining her colleagues in a chorus of denunciation of Russia and sounding the tocsin of possible war. Spanish Civil War redux? Yes, in the sense that although the actors have changed, the ideological division serving to define the 1930s culminating in the run-up to and final outbreak of World War II is the same: Fascism and Anti-Fascism as world-historical forces. How can this still be true? The oft-repeated phrase, “History repeats itself,” has value when the foundations of deep

ideological divisions, supported by accompanying social structures and political economies, have not been eradicated. Participants change, the base remains constant.

I do not wish to trot out an arid interpretation of Marxism (in any case, I've always preferred "Marxian analysis," to avoid rigid application of a richly-endowed intellectual system), but the constant historical pattern corresponds to and is inseparable from the advanced stage of capitalism, capitalism perhaps at the end of its tether, except for the resort to extreme measures—war, social control at home, cultural sanction for xenophobia and ethnocentrism, a doctrine of superiority, and the perceived necessity for Imperialism, whether in one case, territorial, or the other, financial-commercial penetration—to stave off enervation and decline. Capitalism in extremis is a tip-off of increased predatory behavior in the world, precisely as the supposed remedy for a stage of consolidation which, requiring a systematized hierarchy of wealth and power, and resulting widening of class differences, endemic underconsumption, and weakening of labor rights, in order to satisfactorily work, risks the structural conditions of economic stagnation and social unrest, thereby intensifying the role of business-government interpenetration in promoting the power of the State for stabilizing internal economic and class relations and achieving, via expansion, a favorable position in international markets.

Based on the foregoing, I hypothesize the analogous conditions for capitalist development, including comparable stages of the respective political economies, of Germany in the 1930s and the US from say 1970 to the present, specifically, a prefascist configuration, actualized as fascism in the German context and threatening to do so in the American, possibly dragging the European Union and Japan with it. The extent to which the US is contributing to a world trend toward fascism can be seen in the similarities with the earlier German case, beyond an evident retrograde posture in the world, the actual degree of consolidation and concentration, both of banking and industry, the function of interpenetration for the stabilization AND militarization of capitalism, and the customary hierarchical consequences of wealth-and-income distribution, including that which leads to the Leadership Principle: mass acceptance of the moral superiority of the political-cultural heroes, whether at the pinnacle of business, government, or the military. As for the Spanish Civil War redux, Ukraine serves as the surrogate for Spain because of a world fissure rapidly taking form which could eventuate in fuller conflict. For historians, the Spanish Civil War was the dress rehearsal for World War II; Ukraine, one fervently hopes, will not complete the picture.

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The tables are turning. NATO has all the trappings of a Spenglerian nightmare—the decline of the West, for our purposes, the US-EU nucleus of World Civilization, meeting as I write in the Welsh resort of Celtic Manor, nominally to discuss Ukraine, ISIS, and Afghanistan, but in fact, the latter two as sideshow, to use Ukraine as the means for firming up a central core of power (let's include Japan and Israel here) able to withstand pressures for decentralizing the US sponsored and enforced international framework based on American military-financial dominance. Russia, China, but what also of an increasingly restive Latin America, even, opening in Africa and Southeast Asia to Chinese economic penetration, and down the list of nations sliding away from colonial-imperial Western supervision? The West is becoming desperate, as if to resurrect the falling-domino theory (which it never really abandoned, its anticommunism always operating on and energizing that principle), so that Ukraine is fast being reduced to an all-or-nothing proposition, and Putin the



Rasputin behind the scene ready to strike at all of Europe. More than likely, Li awaits on the Pacific side—so there is no excuse but to face down the Enemies at the Gate. NOW, not when it's too late.

Here the silence of Boisto is deafening, the Finnish island where US and Russian experts gathered to issue a 24-point plan for defusing the conflict, elements of which Putin (see below) adopted, e.g., UN peacekeepers in a supervisory capacity, and closely related to the Poroshenko-Putin demarche to lessen tensions with respect to Ukraine that Celtic Manor is fearful of accomplishment. A British official (quoted in *The Guardian*, Sept. 4) stated: “The meeting will provide leaders with the opportunity to hear [P]resident Poroshenko’s [present to brief NATO leaders] assessment of the latest situation on the ground and his discussion with President Putin. It will also send a clear signal of their support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and that the ONUS IS ON RUSSIA to de-escalate the situation.” (caps., mine) Prejudgment and conviction, vital for the pending business, a rapid-reaction force to halt a putative Russian takeover. And this force, it is becoming clearer, is meant, as the prototype, to legitimize NATO intervention anywhere in the world, NATO’s Euro-centered mission deftly shelved (it had been already, in Iraq and Afghanistan) on the premise that whatever is disfavored however distant places Europe and America in danger. We now see as part of the defense for airstrikes against ISIS that the movement, and presumably even more sinister offshoots, will be landing off the beaches of Long Island and Florida, or at least sending their agents on flights to New York, Chicago, and L.A. Mixing the issues together at the NATO summit conjures up, and I believe is so intended, thus does the US-EU-NATO policymaking mind work, a UNIVERSALIZED threat to all that Western society holds dear.

Thus the Obama-Cameron joint-editorial in *The Times* of London the day preceding the summit meeting [Sept. 3] linked ISIS and Russia together as interrelated threats to US-European security: “Whether it is regional aggression [i.e., Russia in Ukraine] going unchecked or the prospect that foreign fighters could return from Iraq and Syria [i.e., ISIS] to pose a threat in our countries, the problems we face today threaten the security of the British and American people, and THE WIDER WORLD.” (caps., mine) A neat extension of meaning and jurisdiction, for they go on to say that NATO must make itself into a “more effective security network that fosters stability around the world,” to which they add, NATO members must do more in the way of military spending.

This is a busy agenda, not quite an inverted Yalta or even Dumbarton Oaks, but, perhaps as we’ll see in retrospect, a collaboration to halt the historical process before the world that the US and Europe knew and largely dominated completely unravels. Putin surmises as much. The West is ideologically tied in knots, making it overreach, as now, flirting with disaster in Ukraine, until hastening its relative decline by having counterterrorism create far more enemies than its resources—here, think drones—can address, it collapses in a paroxysm of hatred, arrogance, and misplaced dreams of glory. Obama incorporates the destructive tendencies in his own person, a fit candidate to preside over the Sisyphean climb downward of a nation whose pretentious ambition was world dominance, each step from now on a further descent into Hades.

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Further clarification of the immediate diplomatic setting for the NATO meeting reveals that Putin, on Sept. 3, had indeed engaged with Poroshenko, and presented a specific 7-point plan for a permanent ceasefire which stands in marked contrast to Obama’s bellicose statement in Estonia of the same date, and to the general tenor of the meeting itself, which clearly was out for blood—Putin

and Russia's. Neil MacFarquhar's NYT article, "Putin Lays Out Proposal to End Ukraine Conflict," (Sept. 3), counterpoints a plan of conciliation to summit histrionics and demonization. MacFarquhar: "On the eve of a NATO summit meeting focused on Russian aggression [bless The Times' unbiased usage]... Putin... unveiled on Wednesday [Sept. 3] a seven-point peace plan for Ukraine while... Obama and other Western leaders tried to keep the spotlight on the Kremlin's role in stoking the conflict there and the penalties it should suffer for doing so." In essence, "both sides 'end active offensive operations,'" while, for the reporter, the plan "seemed to raise more questions than it answered," yet, let the world judge both its feasibility and rationality for ending the crisis. Succinctly, MacFarquhar again: "Aside from the cease-fire, the plan laid out by Mr. Putin called for Ukrainian artillery to pull back and out of range of the eastern separatists' strongholds [i.e., population centers, as I brought out in a previous article]; an end to airstrikes; an exchange of all detainees; opening up humanitarian corridors for residents of the separatist areas [Putin had also called for safety corridors for Ukrainian army troops to return home]; repairing damaged infrastructure; and deploying international observers to monitor the cease-fire."

I think, reasonable, particularly because he made no mention of the region's changed political status as a condition or demand. Not surprisingly, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Victoria Nuland's favorite statesman, at least in promoting the coup, said, "Putin's real plan is the destruction of Ukraine and the resumption of the U.S.S.R.," i.e., the double-barreled charged of invasion/ conquest and the return of Stalin and Communism. Not to be outdone, Obama tossed cold water on the plan from the outset, in his Estonian news conference saying, "We haven't seen a lot of follow-up on so-called announced cease-fires." But then, coming out swinging about the putative invasion: "It is a brazen assault on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, a sovereign and independent European nation. It challenges that most basic of principles of our international system: that borders cannot be redrawn at the barrel of a gun, that nations have the right to determine their own future." Sounds great, were not regime change, intervention, and war second-nature to US foreign policy—territory, as I noted previously, being no longer a primary objective, as developed in the Gallagher and Robinson article, "The Imperialism of Free Trade."

My NYT Comment on the MacFarquhar article, same date, follows:

The chief casualty of the impending Putin-Poroshenko rapprochement is Barack Obama, warmonger of the first water. Poor NATO summit, gunning for war, doing everything possible—witness Rasmussen's irresponsible statements—to generate tension. Should peace break out, what will happen to the demonization of Putin? Perhaps NYT will stop throwing around the word "aggression" so casually, and strike a balance by re-examining fascist elements in the Kiev government.

Yes, we are in the Cold War, and seem—judging from Congressional support for Ukraine—to like it that way. America without war might be forced to consider the sad state of the domestic economy, health care system, infrastructure. Better these distractions, than solving internal problems.

Maybe CIA could be used to "disappear" Poroshenko, for his latest move toward civility and moderation is the last thing the US-EU-NATO complex wants. Perhaps Nuland can help engineer another COUP, with Svoboda and Right Sector openly praised and given the keys of government.

Also, in this immediate setting, we see, just prior, Peter Baker and Steven Erlanger's NYT article, "U.S. and Europe Are Struggling With Response to a Bold Russia," (Sept. 2), implying what the heart of the NATO summit is about: Russia, of course, but walking a tightrope in calibrating the punishment. They write: "American and European officials are struggling to devise a response as Russia bears down on Ukraine, searching for new measures that will have more impact than the economic sanctions imposed so far, without risking major damage to their own industries or a military escalation that could spiral out of control." In fact, only two days later, we see caution being thrown to the wind as hostility toward Russia, Obama's function judging by his Estonian remarks and joint-editorial with Cameron, as contrasted with a certain demurring on the part of Italy and France, no longer dwelled on the economic impact for the EU of sanctions, while planning for the rapid-strike force was hardly calculated to assuage Russian fears of military engagement.

Despite media efforts to emphasize unanimity, and Obama's exhortations to achieve it, Baker-Erlanger are loathe to admit that "[d]espite anger at Russian actions, there are few signs that Europe has the stomach for a more confrontational policy if the White House does not [the fiction here that Obama is devoted to peace and eschews conflict]. In the end, European leaders whose economies are dependent on Russian energy are reluctant to widen the conflict beyond additional sanctions. Instead, they may seek an outcome that makes some concessions to the Kremlin." This is very much the White House's party line—blame Europe for not standing firm in the face of Soviet aggression. As one defense guru put the matter: "It may be 'deeply unappetizing'...but Europe favors 'some form of cease-fire and some degree of negotiation that will give eastern Ukraine more autonomy than Kiev wants and a clear sign that Ukraine won't join NATO.'" Not to worry! If Obama, Cameron, and Rasmussen have their way, none of the above will happen, negotiation per se the devil's work that compromises freedom and democracy.

My NYT Comment on the Baker-Erlanger article, same date, follows:

Despite their flippant charge of "Russian aggression," the reporters make a signal contribution by telling us of the BOISTO plan, which has otherwise gone unnoticed. Signers are no pushovers or Russophiles, and for them to talk sense while others like Menendez and Strobe Talbott dangerously push the envelope toward confrontation alerts us to just how extreme Congress, most of the think-tanks, and the Obama administration are in demonizing Putin and overlooking Nazi-like elements in the Kiev government.

Actually, the NATO summit in Wales tomorrow, with Obama attending, may disappoint the US-EU-NATO hawks because Poroshenko seems—by today's MacFarquhar report—less desirous of conflict than all those rushing to his side. Scream all one wants to about the nasty Russkie bear, but Putin has been circumspect, and NYT should be more accurate in its reporting of the "I can take Kiev in two weeks" statement, which a) was taken out of context, and b) points up the obvious: that he did NOT order Russian forces to that end.

NYT is having a problem with BIAS, its anti-Putin, anti-Russian position interfering with its reporting. I don't mind the Editorial Board's steady pummeling of Russia, but the front page requires greater journalistic integrity. Board of mediators, delete this Comment if you will; you have to live with your pretensions of a free and independent press.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2014

## **NATO, Spearhead of Western Fascism**

The NATO summit in Wales is over. It marked the convergence of fundamental trends long in the making, the Ukraine crisis merely a way to flesh out the details and provide cover for a more ambitious Western geopolitical posture with respect to Russia and, ultimately, China, with US global hegemony its epicenter. America is on top of the earthquake, a world political-military order shaking down along fault lines (i.e., the decentralization of power) no longer susceptible to US unilateral dominance, supervision, and control. The Old World, which is to say, international relations frozen into place during the Cold War, without taking into account changes constantly taking place at the periphery, focused on Russia as America's chief adversary, the Evil One, for which NATO was brought into being to oppose, surmount, and provide the ideological rationale for an inclusive anticommunism to legitimize further preparation for war against it. McCarthyism at home was the tip of the iceberg for the bipartisan outward thrust of American capitalism, Russia conjured up as the ever-present menace to its benevolent spread and as the object of xenophobic fear raising doubt of US survival. NATO was a convenience, also a preliminary step in the integration of the European economy the better for American commercial-financial penetration.

The Old World, from the US perspective of today, is obsolete, not to be cast off as an historical remnant, however, but integrated into the New World, in which Russia, remaining useful as ideological scarecrow and whipping boy, is made to serve as the domino-theory effect in reverse. No longer, e.g., if ISIS is not exterminated or suppressed in the Middle East, it will storm the beaches of Montauk Point or Key West, though that too is part of the American mindset, so trained are we like Pavlov's dogs to respond to cues as programmed, but slowly realizing the possibilities of the doctrine and, over the last quarter-century, taking the initiative, we have applied it to the Other Side: if Russia falls, or practically speaking, becomes weakened, contained, finally, fragmented into separate parts, then comes China, and after China, an awakening Third World which may or may not be willing to play by the IMF-World Bank ground rules. From the 1980s on, one can taste America's limitless, military-backed, paradigm of domination in world-terms of politics, economics, and ideology, exactly at the historical moment when it is no longer viable of realization.

The shift from Old to New World occurs precisely when American power, still obviously considerable, is being displaced with the rise of multiple power-sectors themselves on the ascendance while America is facing a steady decline through over-commitment to militarism (in the form of military appropriations, interventions, weaponry-and-nuclear modernization, waste and corruption in defense contracts, global system of bases, etc.), the market-fundamentalism orientation which has led to deregulation, capitalism run amuck, a tattered if not shattered social safety net, urban decay, rotting infrastructure, and much more, including wage stagnation and unemployment pointing to widespread class-differentiation that is oiled over through the institutional fostering of false consciousness. Quite a mouthful, yet indicative of what has been driving USG and political-economic-military elites: global showdown to restore American supremacy where in fact this is no longer possible.

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Enter the NATO summit, Sept. 4-5, an air of tangible desperation, explicit recognition of a turning point, as though the future of the West was on trial (which may be true, at least as the US would like to define it), measures solemnly taken—a rapid-strike force on a permanent basis, the threat of further sanctions, a 28-nation reaffirmation of collective defense, even the pledge of member states’ eventually beefing up their defense spending—all overtly, pointedly directed to Russia. This, in the face of a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine that all parties, US and EU/NATO members, would like to scuttle, lest the intended confrontation with Russia go awry. My surmise: the agreement will not be allowed to stand. Too much rides on forcing Russia, as if in a scheme of entrapment, to counter the US-EU-NATO military movements to the Russian border, besides the strike force and missile deployments already in place, the new much-discussed at the meeting infrastructure for use by the strike force, and capable of expansion, in member countries adjacent to Russia; for, if response is made to these offensive developments, then NATO, with the Obama-Cameron-Rasmussen blessing, has the option to start a war, the consequences of which I leave to the imagination.

Unquestionably, this summit is historic. It marks a concrete escalation of purpose, ideology, planning, program. It also confirms the New World-American style. Leaders are more-or-less in agreement on a unified front with respect to Russia, but not necessarily what lies beyond—the “beyond” in this case a clearing the deck, first, willingly to accept America as the architect of world order, to which all members of NATO assent, and second, Obama’s and America’s going the extra mile, containing, isolating CHINA, using Russia both as dress rehearsal and neutralized so as not to come to China’s defense, and then, in counterrevolutionary fashion, define the permissible boundaries of modernization in Africa, Latin America, and, Japan excepted, the remainder of Asia, to which the NATO members have not fully assented (nor are likely to). Here, US hegemony slowly, objectively, shifts to the more pathetic stance and reality of hubris, one sort of the retribution already taking form being Islamic radicalism, but Third World social revolution cannot be entirely gainsaid.

If Obama succeeds (and those who come after operating, as likely, in the same vein), it will be seen that the NATO summit itself is an exercise in hubris. When the world seeks peace, the rapid-strike force, and its acknowledged character as the prototype for global application, including NATO involvement, hardly speaks to that yearning. The summit therefore is seemingly a last-ditch effort to preserve international tensions as the ratifying condition of Western supremacy. In the process, hopefully, as the US-EU-NATO would have it, there is sufficient push-back to reverse the flow of the falling-domino effect, ending in the pacification of all indigenous peoples, the US supreme all the while. Sanctions, the members recognized (although this didn’t stop them from approving further escalation), would not do the trick with Russia, so that explicit use of force, presupposing if not ground troops, then everything short (or long!) of that, would be needed, gave the outcome a sinister edge. Time then to look closer, mindful the Poroshenko-Putin agreement for a ceasefire occurred outside the context and framework of the meeting, rather than attempted and attended to as the main order of business, thus confirming participants’ hostility to an accord and revealing the wish that it fail—a wish easily translatable into ways and means of sabotaging it, including more direct punishment of Russia and regime change in Ukraine.

New York Times reporters Steven Erlanger, Julie Davis, and Stephen Castle summed up the results of the NATO meeting in their aptly titled article, “NATO Plans a Special Force to Reassure

Eastern Europe and Deter Russia,” (Sept. 5), a frank avowal of deterrence, not candidly bruited about in these gatherings for a quarter-century, directed specifically to Russia—an accurate reading of what transpired. The reporters write: “The alliance said it would establish a rapid-reaction force with an essentially permanent presence in Eastern Europe and would enhance military cooperation with Ukraine.” The force, but also its contemplated permanence, marks a tangible step toward confrontation with Russia, at the same time that the Poroshenko-Putin ceasefire agreement stands in contradiction to the tenor of the meeting, so that to push forward, in disregard of the latter (except to pay it lip-service), Obama mouths the warning, “actions have consequences,” to reiterate that Russia is not out of the woods. He even suggests at the closing news conference that Putin had buckled because of “enhance[d] deterrence and coordinated sanctions... to agree to a tentative cease-fire in Ukraine” (reporters’ paraphrasing), when in fact Putin had drawn up his plan earlier and favored its provisions from the start. Obama did his best to cast doubt on the plan and Putin’s character, not mentioning that Poroshenko’s own plan, formulated in June, was practically identical to Putin’s. Given the supposed object of the meeting—peace in Ukraine, tough talk was needed to discredit its possibility, and hence, Anders Rasmussen, NATO’s secretary general, noted that the rapid-reaction force would be “a continuous presence” deterring Russian aggression, to which he added: “Should you [Russia] even think of attacking one ally, you will be facing the whole alliance.”

With words of encouragement like that, who needs Poroshenko-Putin—for peace will ring from every rooftop and church spire, in the spirit of US-EU-NATO brotherhood for Putin and Russia. Not quite, for agreement or no agreement, the Triumvirate plowed ahead without missing a step. Trust is everything; here it is totally lacking. (I am being charitable; it is not mistrust we find, but the intention to throw up roadblocks wherever possible so as not realize a condition of peace—much like the Israelis with respect to the Palestinian peace process. NATO wants, not an accommodation, but state of constant tension, in order to carry out its US defined-and-financed mission, the spearhead for achieving a dismantling of all rival power systems and independent sources of development. But first things first: Russia, its crippling.) If the goal is peace, timing works against it, deliberately so, because at the meeting it was decided “to go ahead with new sanctions on Russia” BEFORE the peace agreement was even given a chance, therefore a vote of no confidence handicapping it from the start, rather than waiting to see, as a good-will gesture to assist in its success. Merkel lent her voice to the procedure: “Everything is in flux. [The reference is to presumed Russian aggression and withdrawal of Russian troops.] Therefore we should expect that these sanctions could indeed be put in force, but with the proviso that they can be suspended again if this process really takes place.” And she is the model of gentleness, Philip Hammond, British Foreign Secretary, calling for “immediately imposing the sanctions and then lifting them if the cease-fire held.”

Less noticed, Ukraine was occasion, at this meeting, for getting member nations to be more militarily involved. The writers again: “NATO also grappled with the unwillingness of most of its members to meet their commitments to spend an amount equivalent to 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense, an issue on which the United States, which bears most of the alliance’s costs, has become increasingly outspoken.” The tie-in with Ukraine? Rasmussen states: “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is a wake-up call. [The crisis led NATO countries] to reconsider defense investment because it’s now obvious that we cannot take our security for granted.” One suspects that if Ukraine falls (which is not Putin’s intent), Russian banners will fly

over Oslo, London, and Washington. Time, then, for getting the dominoes to fall the other way, Moscow, Beijing, Brasilia, Havana, on down the road.

Next, Neil MacFarquhar's article in *The Times*, "Ukraine Deal Imposes Truce Putin Devised," (Sept. 6), presents the details of the peace plan, credits Putin's authorship, yet—*The Times* will be *The Times*—has sufficient caveats to turn the whole thing sour. He begins: "After five months of intensifying combat that threatened to rip Ukraine apart and to reignite the Cold War, the Ukrainian government and separatist forces signed a cease-fire agreement on Friday [Sept. 5] that analysts considered highly tenuous in a country that remains a tinderbox." Let's ignore the analysts (usually unnamed, sympathetic to the administration) and come to the point, "that the main thrust of the plan was not just endorsed, but laid out," by Putin—though like his colleagues, MacFarquhar sees Russian pressure motivating the acceptance of the plan: "The cease-fire was agreed to after a two-week rebel counteroffensive backed by Russian troops, armor and artillery that threatened to roll back most of the gains the Ukrainian military had made." Force cowed Poroshenko into submission—the US-NYT party line, leaving Obama "hopeful but, based on past experience, skeptical," sort of like launching a ship with a glass of tea, so far as encouragement goes, and particularly off-base and misleading because, as MacFarquhar points out, "The agreement resembles, almost verbatim, a proposal for a truce issued by President Petro O. Poroshenko in June." In June, months before any counteroffensive—or claims of Russian interference.

The point is, the agreement is a good one, one US-EU-NATO leaders should by rights have applauded, if peace was their purpose. The reporter: "The 14-point peace plan includes some references to the cease-fire itself, some practical steps toward returning government control to the southeast Donbass region and some nods toward future political changes.... It includes amnesty for those who disarm and who did not commit serious crimes, and the exchange of all prisoners. Militias will be disbanded, and a 10-kilometer buffer zone—about six miles—will be established along the Russian-Ukrainian border. The area will be subject to joint patrols. The separatists have agreed to leave the administrative buildings they control and to allow broadcasts from Ukraine to resume on local television." What's not to like, Mr. Obama?

And for good measure, the reporter continues: "For the future, the agreement says power will be decentralized and the Russian language protected.... The agreement says the executive in control of each region, the equivalent of a governor, will be appointed after consultations with each region. It also promises early elections and a job-creation program." His parenthetical statement between sentences indicates what the southeast was facing and speaks volumes about its protest against Kiev (Russia not needing to play outside agitator): "An early, failed attempt by more extreme members of the Ukrainian Parliament to ban Russian as an official language was one element that spawned the uprising." Coming from *The Times*, a solid-gold admission. Contrast the timing, NATO summit before and after, before, both Poroshenko and Putin engaged in the peace effort, after, a unified voice of social wreckage, with Ukraine's own future irrelevant to the member states. Hence, "Mr. Poroshenko lauded the agreement in a statement posted on the presidential website, paying tribute in his announcement to the fact that Mr. Putin called for a cease-fire with a seven-point plan Wednesday [Sept. 3]." Conversely, the whole kit-and-caboodle on the other side: "A spectrum of politicians, civil society activists, diplomats and other analysts welcomed the proposal but expressed serious doubts that it could hold given the wide rift between Kiev and the restive eastern regions." Welcomed, with a stiletto, given the expression of serious doubts. The NATO statements

and actions speak for themselves, as in the case of the rapid-reaction force and military assistance to Ukraine.

My New York Times Comment on the MacFarquhar article, same date, follows:

Begin with the lead: “Ukraine Deal Imposes Truce Putin Devised.” Loaded: “Imposes.” as though unwarranted, one-sided, favorable to Russia and Putin. Cannot NYT get over its obsession of being anti-Putin, of treating Russia as reincarnation of Soviet Union, of regurgitating the Cold War scenario at the behest of the Obama administration? Where is journalistic independence? The article is all gloom-and-doom, a truce that will not hold, Obama and his “skepticism,” various “analysts” (the new category of choice to ensure anonymity and/or push a respectable State Dept. line) mouthing shopworn platitudes of doubt, and one more chance to question Putin’s motives and integrity.

Did anyone on the US-EU-NATO side offer a truce plan? I sensed Poroshenko was different from his neofascist colleagues—and apparently I am right. Yet the Western Triumvirate will do anything to disrupt peace. I fear for Poroshenko’s life—or at least his political future. From Obama’s perspective, joined by Cameron and Rasmussen, peace must NOT BE ALLOWED to break out. Eastern Europe must be in a state of disarray so that long-term destabilization will result in Russia’s isolation and dismemberment.

Witness the vitriol coming out of the NATO summit, and the coalition to attack ISIS, partly as distraction from not succeeding in the rupture of East-West relations, partly to affirm US leadership whatever the issue, so long as conflation of the two, identifying Russia and Putin with terrorism succeeds.

Finally, we have the wisdom of The Times editorial board, “A Cease-Fire in Ukraine,” (Sept. 6), which confirms, beyond the use of its intemperate language (revealing uncontrolled animosity,) the foregoing discussion about what I am terming, the spearhead of Western fascism, in this case, the predilection for global domination by means of force, ideological certitude, and our friend, a consuming hubris. Other elements of fascism, including the militarization of advanced capitalism, and the degree of consolidation within the political-economic structure (commercial-financial-industrial), need not be addressed here, their presence nonetheless present and relevant to the wider confrontation between the West and the current periphery. The editorial begins: “With pressures building on all sides, the adversaries in the war in Ukraine announced a cease-fire on Friday [Sept. 5]. Combat in the contested southeastern region that killed some 2,600 people in the past five months paused, perhaps for a while.” Not an encouraging start, nor admission that many of the 2,600 casualties were civilian deaths caused by Ukrainian shelling. Nor do we find other than the customary demonization of Putin: “It would be a mistake to assume that the agreement guarantees a quick and easy path to stability for Ukraine, and that is because [he] has shown himself to be a reckless and unpredictable provocateur in creating the worst conflict with the West since the Cold War.”

In effect, Stalin II. Then the canard about Russian/separatist military successes forcing Poroshenko (“in the last two weeks, Ukrainian forces suffered heavy setbacks, with the separatists opening a third front... around the port of Mariupol”) to come to terms. Even after citing provisions unexceptionable by any standard, e.g., “compliance overseen by international monitors,” the editorial opens both barrels of denunciation: “In his quest for control and regional power, Mr. Putin



poses a serious threat to the international order by disregarding borders, violating agreements and pursuing an expansionist vision without regard to other states or even the effect that economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation could have on Russia.” Save for the last point, since the US sponsors and enforces sanctions and is rarely if ever on the receiving end, The Times editorial board might well be collectively looking in the mirror, or to be exact, presenting an analysis that applies not only to Obama but to American presidents, almost without exception, from Harry Truman on.

The NATO summit, however, was not a total washout. Obama came through splendidly at his Friday news conference, saying NATO would uphold Ukraine’s “sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and right to defend itself,” and, on the military front, praise is further in order: “The 28 NATO members have promised to provide Ukraine with logistics assistance, training and help in organizing the military command structure and related forces. The United States and its allies are also debating going even further and supplying defensive weapons, including radar and anti-tank weapons.” Not that “Ukraine could ever prevail in a war with Russia. But the intent of the NATO summit decisions is to encourage a political solution by raising the cost of further military actions by the rebels and Mr. Putin.” What does “raising the cost” entail? And what kind of political solution (why not get behind the Poroshenko-Putin initiative?), and, given the costs, is a “political solution” even likely or possible?

The Times can’t be bothered by small points, it is important to bull ahead: “The Europeans, who too often hesitated during this crisis, on Friday showed more resolve by agreeing to stronger sanctions that affect Russia’s access to capital markets, defense, dual-use goods and sensitive technology.” Bullying ahead, they must cross the finish line: “Now they must carry them out and also fulfill a commitment to pay for the rapid reaction force and other promised defensive measures.” The Times doesn’t miss a thing. And as a good coach for the American military, the EU, NATO, the whole Free World (!), it closes: “If their pledges are hollow, the Ukraine crisis could get a lot worse.” War is peace; no, war is honor, the American Way, manliness in battle dress.

My New York Times Comment on the Editorial, same date, follows:

This editorial will come back to haunt The Times, as irresponsible, sensational, productive of war. “...perhaps for a while,” hopeful the cease-fire will collapse. “...Putin has shown himself to be a reckless and unpredictable provocateur in creating the worst conflict with the West since the Cold War.” Create the conflict? What of the coup? the Nuland evidence? the neofascist influence in Kiev? the US-EU-NATO design prior to the coup to advance forces into Eastern Europe to contain Russia? As for reckless, your own MacFarquhar concedes the PEACE plan was initiated by Putin, had the agreement of Poroshenko, and in all respects, including international peacekeepers, was reasonable, workable, intelligent, in contrast to Obama and the NATO summit in general ridiculing it and beefing up anti-Russian rhetoric and military plans: rapid-reaction force, infrastructure, both near Russia.

One would think Poroshenko a traitor, by NYT reasoning, for joining with Putin. If he is assassinated, one knows where to look, for peace in Eastern Europe is anathema to the West and US involvement in regime change (even in Ukraine) does not augur well for Poroshenko. NYT cites provisions of the plan, yet, menacing tone without specific criticisms. What is wrong with it? Why say, Putin “has consistently operated in a deceitful

manner,” unless your purpose is to discredit it? And then berating the Europeans for not being more anti-Russian and militaristic. A black day.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

### **Technological Fetishism, Path to Conquest**

His predecessors have put the War Machine into constant action carrying over into his presidency, but this is Obama’s chance to make a fresh start, inaugurate a war on his own, that against ISIS, which can bind future administrations to its continuance, and thus keep unbroken the American doctrine, practice, and ideological savoring of permanent war. Strictly, this aspiration is not new, for his careful nurturing of drone assassination was designed and structured, through the Terror Tuesday conferences with his national security team to keep up-to-date a constantly evolving and replenished “hit list” the basis for ongoing action that would bind future administrations. Continuity is everything, if bipartisan planning and execution for global hegemony is to have meaning—and if America is to prove its mettle as world-beating champion of “humanitarian” intervention, with the prizes of commercial-financial dominance that go with it. Obama opens a new chapter in the by-now predictable, to the point of tedious, effort single-handedly to define, shape, and control the world system to its own everlasting advantage.

It will fail; the interesting question is: Will America bring the rest of the world down with it? Hegemonic counterrevolution has its pluses and minuses for all concerned, the world, the hegemon, perhaps most of all, the social forces unleashed by the destructive character of the Quest for Power. Negative: the US in its global aggrandizement, and the reason for it, has extracted a significant proportion of the world’s wealth and natural resources to elevate its own standard of living, capital accumulation, and surplus for diversion into militaristic might, leaving behind a trail of retarded development in the Third World and a record of repression to ensure favorable conditions on the ground (a general pattern of support of, even to the point of installing, dictatorships for carrying out comprador-functions on America’s behalf). It is this political-ideological despoilment, playing favorites, wrenching apart the cultural architecture of the penetrated, occupied, often economically raped countries, that has given rise to groups seeking revenge and the restoration of honor increasingly as now taking form through religious expression, a primordial return to what in the lives of many in the affected areas is their most effective means of resistance. The US created ISIS, activating a residual or latent sentiment of religious-orthodox-exclusivity that, had not its regional modus vivendi been so disrupted by military colonialism, might have lead to normalized intraregional yet manageable conflict. The same could be said about the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq, bin Laden’s rise, in response to American military bases, in Saudi Arabia, the promotion to be used against Russia of the Taliban in Afghanistan and subsequent turn-around against them, and now, finally, ISIS, good enough to work with against Assad in Syria, until the fulsome igniting of its hatred because of the forcible renting of the religious fabric in the Middle East.

The US has an uncanny ability to peel away ancient tribalisms historically dormant by crashing into areas unmindful if not contemptuous of the religious-cultural treasures of civilizations, thereby liberating anti-modern dreams of caliphates, whatever it takes to resist or eliminate the haughty intruder at the gates. No, I neither apologize for nor am a disciple of ISIS, but the ultimate insult to the world, the movement, and ourselves, is, by ignoring America’s contributing role to its religious

extremism (doctrinally, perhaps always present, but acted upon, not until now), to make of it a cause célèbre in the war on terrorism, an American-defined strategy of global hegemony. ISIS is pretext and rationale alike for keeping American militarism on track. And it fits the bill perfectly: we lambaste Russia for putatively invading Ukrainian territory, yet cross borders continually via airstrikes as surrogate for boots on the ground. Iraq and Syria are now in the crosshairs, a high-tech lynching of ISIS in which technological fetishism, popularized initially through drone assassination, makes collateral damage, political murder of civilians, children killed with impunity, acceptable because wholly impersonal and therefore sanitized.

This is Obama to a tee: the sterilization of murder through the employment of overwhelming force. He has America with him, in fact, ahead of him (if that were possible!), pushing him further along, not that he vacillates, is indecisive, or even seeks cover for his actions, but because by creating the illusion that he is weighed down by moral conscience, is deliberative (his oft-mentioned “cool”), Nobelist Everyman par excellence, he can then, in close collaboration with the military and intelligence communities, turn on the power in the art of antiseptic warfare. I call it, nihilistic militarism, ISIS the target du jour, in the right place at the right time—but with its vanquishing, others will follow—as a convenience for flexing American muscle, as meanwhile, on the main stage, Obama is gearing up America for the confrontation with Russia, and beyond, China. Not coincidentally, the NATO summit in Wales sought to merge the two themes, ISIS and Russia, as, if not quite interrelated then at least simultaneous, threats to US-sponsored freedom and democracy in the world.

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As a run-up to Obama’s Address to the American People, which (as of this writing, it occurs tomorrow [Sept. 10]) changes nothing, I was struck by Eric Schmitt, Michael Gordon, and Helene Cooper’s article in the New York Times, “Destroying ISIS May Take Years, U.S. Officials Say,” (Sept. 8), because it confirms, inadvertently, the continuities in American foreign policy, the sustainment of a permanent-war doctrine and psychology. America without war is like canned sardines without olive oil—both would otherwise turn rancid and decay. Stated differently, the informal maxim of policymakers from the top down is, create enemies in order to destroy them, so as to be able to maintain a prodigious war economy and ensure a perpetual war machine. That, I submit, is where we’re at. In the judicious prose expected by The Times of its reporters (even Schmitt and Cooper, among the best on the national-security beat), the article begins: “The Obama administration is preparing to carry out a campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria that may take three years to complete, requiring a sustained effort that could last until AFTER [my caps.] President Obama left office, according to senior administration officials.”

The pluses of hegemonic counterrevolution can be stated simply as, not religious-orthodox-exclusivity, but its opposite, an emancipation of political consciousness through the rise of progressive social forces, both tendencies a response to American global interventionism, the particular direction that each takes being dependent on the historical-structural context in which the intervention occurs. Modernization can be sufficiently repressive, as in grafting nascent industrialism onto a peasant-feudal agricultural base that leaves class relationships intact, so that the transition goes either way: ISIS-style fanaticism which is grounded in the rejection of modernity while also intensifying renewal of religion, thus placating elites and, at the same time, providing comfort to lower social groups, or, conversely, radical/revolutionary movements of change,

selectively applying religion (e.g., liberation theology) or altogether dispensing with it, in breaking through the prevailing institutional crust of society and fighting back for all the years and generations of servitude. To America, ISIS is the preferable threat—or threat it be, given, despite the new theme, its threat to the Homeland as standard propagandistic fare, a somewhat remote one in terms of logistics and will—to that of democratization carried forward by the dispossessed. In fact, the action against one, ISIS, is intended to forestall the rise of the other. Much depends on the success in destroying ISIS, from America's standing in the world, to quelling social aspirations for peace and human dignity aborted through achieving that standing.

Next, the reporters lay out what is known thus far about the administration plan for attacking ISIS (quite secret from a transparent government only a day away from The Speech), meticulous schematics of the war machine, to wit: “The first phase, an air campaign with nearly 145 airstrikes in the past month, is already underway to protect ethnic and religious minorities [those on our side, enlisted in the fight and supplied with arms and equipment] and American diplomatic, intelligence and military personnel, and their facilities, as well as to begin rolling back ISIS gains in northern and western Iraq.” Whoa. For one who makes a thing about crossing borders, 145 airstrikes ain't hay (what is intervention anyway?), but more to the point, WHAT are American diplomatic, intelligence and military personnel doing in these places? Non-intervention: there would be no need for protection, if personnel were not already there. The American presence is thought by Washington and our “partners” invisible—no boots on the ground, only Nike running shoes. (Practically every member of Congress interviewed [Sept. 9] wants no boots on the ground, just massacre the bastards through air power.)

The second phase, Iraqi government inclusiveness proclaimed, “involve[s] an intensified effort to train, advise or equip the Iraqi military, Kurdish fighters and possibly members of Sunni tribes,” proxy warfare now customary, although were the reporters frank, and not delivering the administration line, this is still intervention, Adam Smith adapted as the Invisible Hand of global hegemony. The third phase, however, is especially interesting and significant: “The final, toughest and most politically controversial [the point of the address is to get over that hurdle, if it be one] phase of the operation—destroying the terrorist army in its sanctuary inside Syria—might not be completed until the next administration. Indeed, some Pentagon planners envision a military campaign lasting at least 36 months.” Create the precedent, and the future will take care of itself, shoring up war-continuities, binding later presidents, keeping up the martial spirit and all that is built on it. Appropriately, Obama is a Democrat, hardly, on foreign policy, an atypical one. (Yesterday [Sept. 8] he gave a White House luncheon for nation-security advisers of the past, from soup to nuts, Hadley to Haas, strictly bipartisan, which goes to show that not even a thin coin could drive a line of separation between the parties, drumming up support for the war on ISIS. With this bunch, the occasion could have been, war, now fill in the blank.) He like others is aware that America must push war to the hilt, lest it turn its resources inward and possibly democratize the social system. For where would the Democrats be, should that happen, and a vital working class thereby see through them? False consciousness is the fifth wheel of the war machine and the entire engine block of the Democratic party.

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Obama's speech, the reporters write, will be “to make his case for launching a Unites States-led offensive against Sunni militants gaining ground in the Middle East, seeking to rally support for a

broad military mission while reassuring the public that he is not plunging American forces into another Iraq war.” Obama: “What I want people to understand is that over the course of months, we are going to be able to not just blunt the momentum [of the militants]. We are going to systematically degrade their capabilities; we’re going to shrink the territory that they control; and, ultimately, we’re going to defeat them.” Justification? None offered. The wording itself is like the inexorable force of the God-ordained, or the colossal Israeli bulldozer knocking down Palestinian homes. It’s also a train of thought we’ve heard many times before, summed up by the quaint phrase, “mission creep.”

Here Obama’s Clausewitzian genius is proudly displayed. “The military campaign [he] is preparing has no obvious precedent.” Unlike Yemen and Pakistan,” it is not expected to be limited to drone strikes against militant leaders.” Unlike Afghanistan,” it will not include the use of ground troops, which Mr. Obama has ruled out.” (Parenthetically, for now.) Unlike Kosovo, Clinton, NATO, “it will not be compressed into an intensive 78-day tactical and strategic air campaign.” Perhaps most important: “And unlike during the air campaign that toppled... Qaddafi... the Obama administration is no longer ‘leading from behind,’ but plans to play the central role in building a coalition to counter ISIS.” The implied uniqueness, fitting, of course, in that ISIS is Obama’s very own exercise in intervention (I should prefer, “aggression,” but do not want to stir too many feathers, as it is), turns out to be wrong on all or most counts. Yemen and Pakistan were never limited to drones, unless one wishes to ignore CIA-Special Ops advance targeting setups and paramilitary operations on the side. Afghanistan, the very denial of the use of ground troops augurs poorly for prospects they won’t be used, and in any case paramilitary forces somehow don’t count as part of ground troops. Kosovo may be Clinton indefinitely extended, ISIS fighters presumably, as with all America’s foes, embedded in thick population centers, making strategic bombing and civilian casualties a small price to pay for eradicating it. And Libya, now a superb object lesson in military planning—don’t lead from behind but from up front; actually, same difference because leading from behind IS to play a central role, just as NATO is America’s proxy not only in Europe but increasingly throughout the world. Behind or in front it still hides behind “friends and allies” to lessen the detection of war crimes and opprobrium for their commission.

We now have a new man on the block to share with Ben Rhodes the responsibility of putting a smiley face on Obama’s geopolitical framework of unilateral American power in the world. Anthony Blinken, already on board for inflating the Russian military threat on Ukraine, here, as Obama’s deputy national security adviser, is laying the propaganda basis for perpetual involvement—the prolonged mission: “It’s going to take time [to defeat ISIS], and it will probably go beyond even this administration to get to the point of defeat.” John Kerry, similarly: “It may take a year, it may take two years, it may take three years. But we’re determined it has to happen.” To make his point, he and Chuck Hagel—like Cohen and Schine the dynamic duo of anticommunism in Joe McCarthy’s day—are off to Turkey “to woo another potential ally in the fight against the Sunni militant group.”

I’m glad for the War address, though it will be disguised as Peace and Protection of the Homeland, because it reveals the Democratic party as the war-mongering party, using cultural issues to hide its fascist tendencies in foreign policy and Wall Street affinities/affections in domestic. I do not slight the dignity of anyone when I say, transgender symbolism to hide corporate rapacity and global militarism, least of all those are duplicitously used for political ends. We shall

all come into our own, as we see fit, when our seeming friends are exposed as miscreants, sadists, purveyors of violence, artists of divide-and-conquer the better to serve their Masters and stay in office.

My New York Times Comment to the Schmitt, Gordon, Cooper article, same date, follows:

Procedurally, the Obama administration is again up to no good. Its framework for executing (pardon the pun) drone assassination, the use of a permanent, ever revised “hit list,” was specifically intended to bind subsequent administrations to the same policy. Here the exact parallel: a campaign ongoing beyond his term that others will not turn off.

As for the campaign, would there have ever been an ISIS, had not the US pursued global hegemony via, among other measures, creation of a worldwide network of military bases. Bin Laden got his start in protesting the desecration of Saudi soil through such bases. Instead of withdrawing from the role of unilateral domination of world political-economic currents and events, America, fearful of losing its grip on military-ideological power, pushes on.

America created ISIS just as it did al Qaeda through persistent interventionism on a global scale. One result, a counterterrorism posture and agenda that has led to massive surveillance of the American people, an electronic McCarthyism to force consent on increased militarism. In addition, to maintain military appropriations at a staggering level, while much of what under FDR we called the “national estate,” from job creation and conservation to a vital social safety net, suffers. As America DECLINES because of its militarism, its effort to stay on top, as here, against ISIS, intensifies and surely will create more ISIS-like movements. Yes, escalation is Obama’s baby.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2014

### **Obama’s War Address**

Is that John Wayne riding toward us, Winchester across his chest, the setting sun as background? Naw, it’s POTUS surrounded by the trappings of office speaking to the American Nation as Commander-in-Chief, holding aloft the newly-minted banner depicting the geopolitical formula for war, one size fits all—“degrade and ultimately destroy”—now, paraphrasing Brecht’s Arturo Ui: today, ISIS, tomorrow... Russia and China (in the play, today, Harrisburg, tomorrow the World, a modest adaptation of you know who). Obama got off to a good start, the predictable “My fellow Americans” followed by the magical incantation of “friends and allies”—presented ad nauseam in Washington to cover the US’s leading role in organizing, as typically in the use of NATO, but SEATO not far behind as we look to the future, military action globally through deceptively lessening our footprint—“to degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group known as ISIL.” (ISIS/ISIL, the constant reminder in the media the two are one, the latter adding sophistication—in the know—to the administration in making exquisite distinctions.) So, off we go into the Wild Blue Yonder, the pitch for airstrikes rather than boots on the ground, what I recently termed, technological fetishism, air power somehow an antiseptic mode of killing which comports with, rather than flagrantly violates, international law, as Obama proudly announces 150+ air strikes already against ISIS (let’s stick with that moniker).

Still the first minute, Obama's announcement of the catch-all principle that rationalizes (i.e., legitimizes) every form of US action—and has for years, from shock-and-awe saturated bombing to waterboarding to drone assassination to CIA secret prisons, on and on: “As commander in chief, my highest priority is the security of the American people.” By definition, whatever and whomever we oppose, threatens our security—again ISIS, but Russia a near-second and China down the pike. Time for self-congratulation: we took out bin Laden and presumably vacated Iraq and drew down US troops in Afghanistan—how? Of course, “Thanks to our military and counterterrorism professionals, America is safer.” Professionals, conjuring up slide rules instead of deadly missiles—further lingo of antiseptic warfare. But America, don't sit back, don't let success go to your head, the very gains of counterterrorism (always confirming the THREAT is out there), while demonstrating our military prowess and superior ideology, should give the nation assurance of not flinching, and rather, staring down, further danger in the knowledge of final victory. America's enemies are still out there, ready to destroy us. (That's what counterterrorism is all about, keeping Americans in a state of constant fear so that policies from the massive surveillance of our own people to the related massive expenditures on the military can go unquestioned.)

Accordingly, scare the bejesus out of the American public: “Still, we continue to face a terrorist threat. [Read: our very success, which proved not enough, inflates the enormity of the danger facing us.] We can't erase every trace of evil from the world and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. [Emphasize continuity here of policy against evil, also on the very eve of 9/11] And that's why WE MUST REMAIN VIGILANT [my caps.] as threats emerge.” Zero in, although the first words, “at this moment,” suggest other threats lay in wait, which facilitates the permanent-war doctrine I refer to elsewhere, and, without mentioning names, Russia and China: “At this moment the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa, where radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain. And one of those groups is ISIL—which calls itself the Islamic State.” This is a perfectly constructed scare-tactic and scenario for intervention.

“Which calls itself”—we need friends and allies, chiefly at this point proxies for carrying out operations with American training and weaponry, and thus must divest the Islamic State of its Islamic roots (and blur the “grievances” which they exploit, which conceivably may be our doing), all this besides the public relations matter of not wanting to offend the Arab-Muslim world which we need to implement Obama's war plan, despite the hysteria stirred up against it via Homeland Security and counterterrorism. Obama pushes on: “Now let's make two things clear: ISIL is not Islamic. No religion condones the killing of innocents [some might dispute this, every world religion having its victims, most recently, the invasion of Gaza—through US assistance], and the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslims. And ISIL is certainly not a state.... It is recognized by no government nor by the people it subjugates. ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way.”

I do not have to apologize for ISIS or ignore or condone its crimes. Regrettably, the argument, however, is self-serving, the reasoning about a non-state as per se outside the framework of international law, and therefore carrying the presumption of being terrorist, is a direct carryover from the US-Israeli paradigm of non-recognition of a Palestinian state and the imputation that Hamas feasts on its own people (hiding in densely populated areas for its rocket attacks, Gazan civilian casualties its own doing). By current standards, ISIS is neither alone nor unique in the

commission of atrocities, the bill of particulars easily matched by crimes of the US deftly dismissed as unavoidable collateral damage, Israel, ditto (the recent killing of civilians, including women and children in the shelling of UN schools/shelters in Gaza), and as for the grisly vicious acts of beheading, the Saudis at the very same time as the ISIS crimes carried out far more. If everyone else were up-and-up, I'd feel better about Obama's indictment of ISIS: "In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape and force women into marriage. They threatened a religious minority with genocide. And in acts of barbarism, they took the lives of two American journalists—Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff." Detestable as the acts, the constant drumming of the images into the public mind to sway public opinion toward war (wholly successful, as the polls show) is opportunistic and nearly as obscene.

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Where is the speech heading? Obviously, to place the American Homeland under threat, subtly, not directly, but by indirection, which is just as effective. First, the well-worked theme of protecting US embassies and the like, but then the jump to America: "So ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria and the broader Middle East, including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies." In fact, the vaguer, the better, leaving the threat amorphous, ready to pounce—and if the evidence is not forthcoming (not for want of trying), manufacture it, like Saddam's WMD as justification for invading Iraq. Thus, nip ISIS in the bud before American recruits come back to haunt us: "Our intelligence community believes that thousands of foreigners, including Europeans and some Americans, have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks." This also puts friends and allies on notice to get into line.

By now, Obama is on a (propaganda) roll. Frighten Americans, yet reassure them that by giving POTUS a blank check he will summon military power to vanquish all foes. "I know," he goes on, "many Americans are concerned about these threats. Tonight I want you to know that the United States of America [when the full title is laid out, an old speechwriter's trick, time to run for cover] is meeting them with strength and resolve." This is followed by a litany of action—already taken (!): "Last month I ordered our military to take targeted action against ISIL to stop its advances. Since then we've conducted more than 150 successful airstrikes in Iraq. These strikes have protected American personnel and facilities, killed ISIL fighters, destroyed weapons and given space for Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim key territory." So much for Republican criticism; so much for Obama the vacillator, indifferent to democracy and freedom: "These strikes have also helped save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children." The Leader of Determination, deserving our trust, the White House image factory at work to fit the occasion.

I can hear fife and drum in the background slowly rising to a crescendo (my perfervid imagination) as he announces the battle plan. We have an obligatory cautionary note to underplay American involvement: "But this is not our fight alone. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do for themselves. Nor can we take the place of Arab partners in securing their region. That's why I've insisted that additional U.S. action depended upon Iraqis forming an inclusive government, which they have done in recent days."



Sweet reasonableness itself, making all action okay. Horns added, along with mixed chorus, Star-Spangled Banner still barely audible, as Ives might have it, the sales pitch for America leading a Crusade of Freedom against Evil: “So tonight, with a new Iraqi government in place, and following consultations with allies abroad and Congress at home, I can announce that America will LEAD A BROAD COALITION [my caps.] to roll back this terrorist threat. Our objective is clear: We will degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy.”

The plan is simplicity itself: comprehensive, sustained, a full court press, ignoring borders, the world America’s (terrorist-laden) oyster, to be opened up by any means possible. “First, we will conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against these terrorists.” Not just “protecting our own people and humanitarian missions,” but “hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense.” Cymbals clash: “...I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria as well as Iraq.” Fireworks, people standing: “This is a core principle of my presidency: If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven.” The rest is anticlimax, nuts-and-bolts effectuation of the Mighty Confrontation. “Second, we will increase our support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground.” Troop deployment, of course “to support Iraqi and Kurdish forces with training, intelligence and equipment.” Same in Syria, where “we have ramped up our military assistance to the Syrian opposition,” accompanied by a plea to Congress “to give us additional authorities and resources to train and equip these fighters.” (In this regard, Assad must go.)

Finally, third and fourth, same old, same old— increased counterterrorism programs and humanitarian assistance. “... we will continue to draw on our substantial counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks,” and “... we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians who’ve been displaced by this terrorist organization.” Wouldst the same assistance be rendered to innocent civilians displaced—and worse—by ourselves and friends and allies. Consummate workmanship of the national-security team, each implicated in some aspect of the behavior characterizing ISIS, perfecting the art of intervention: “So this is our strategy. And in each of these four parts of our strategy, America will be joined by a broad coalition of partners.” E.g., “already, allies are flying planes with us over Iraq, sending arms and assistance to Iraqi security forces and the Syrian opposition, sharing intelligence and providing billions of dollars in humanitarian [?] aid.” And Kerry is traveling throughout the Middle East shoring up support. Obama in quintessential mode—proxy fascism put in the best possible light: “This is American leadership at its best: We stand with people who fight for their own freedom, and we rally other nations on behalf of our common security and common humanity.” The one-two punch, provide the airpower and rally others to fight on the ground and in other capacities, “the approach,” he continues, “I outlined earlier this year: to use force against anyone who threatens America’s core interests, but to mobilize partners wherever possible to address broader challenges to international order.”

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The peroration to Obama’s Gettysburg Address—here a bit of nostalgia to rally the people, an old-fashioned medley of Over There, Anchors Aweigh, and the Caissons Go Rolling Along—he unashamedly rings the charges on the theme of America’s greatness, first reminding us of what we have recently gone through: “My fellow Americans, we live in a time of great change. Tomorrow

marks 13 years since our country was attacked. Next week marks six years since our economy suffered its worst setback since the Great Depression.” No matter, we are the stronger for it, America being “better positioned today to seize the future than any other nation on Earth.” We’ve got unmatched technology companies and universities, thriving industries, energy independence in the near future, businesses having “the longest uninterrupted stretch of job creation in our history,” not least, exactly what the people want to hear, “I see the grit and determination and common goodness of the American people every day [presumably on the golf links], and that makes me more confident than ever about our country’s future.” Ditto our record abroad. Salute, rev up the engines, America is on its way.

SEPTEMBER 15, 2014

### **Global Hegemonic Mindset**

Achieving world mastery requires confronting questionable areas, current or potential obstructionism to American dominance, sequentially ordered in an intended systematic pattern of hegemony, except that at present multiple trouble spots have appeared—e.g., Iran, Ukraine, ISIS—that muddy the waters and induce confusion by stretching the US to its limits in maintaining its military power, keeping up domestic responsibilities, and withal, staying within the confines of international law. Even though Behemoth has proven a skilled juggler in the recent past, when the Cold War yielded simple dichotomous solutions, the balls now in the air are proving too much to handle. The breakup of other empires, notably Russia’s, has given America greater room to establish and solidify its own, thought at first to be an unmixed blessing, yet now recognized (or dimly appreciated) to be otherwise, the creation of multiple power-centers, i.e., a decentralized global power system pointing to an international standoff entirely unacceptable to US claims of unilateral political-economic-military-ideological leadership in restructuring the world order.

The phrase “world order” is back in vogue, in each era taking on the coloration of geopolitical realities, the expression of the dominant-power configuration, be it, in recent history, the Concert of Powers in the early-to-mid 19th century, the American effort to secure a place in the sun via the Open Door in the latter 19th century, breaking down barriers created by Imperial trade-and-investment restriction, the so-called Imperialism of Free Trade as a newly minted strategy of hegemony, on into the 20th century and two world wars, the framework of traditional imperialism breaking down, the US, first with Theodore Roosevelt’s battleship navy, then, Woodrow Wilson’s skilled use of internationalism to maximize the US’s financial-commercial advantage abroad in world markets, and at home, government-business interpenetration (e.g., Federal Reserve System, Federal Trade Commission) to further consolidate the economic base initiated by TR’s positive encouragement of monopoly (NO, not Teddy the trustbuster), and, the defining step to the present, FDR and the New Deal laying the basis, contingent on the defeat of Hitler, of global venturing outward through international monetary and related conferences, the UN, a purposeful counterweight to the spread of Soviet influence, and the Marshall Plan, America’s initial experiment on a grand scale—with strings attached—of liberal humanitarianism.

1950, the Cold War, America on the historical-structural ascendance, free at home from devastation and rubble, Europe struggling to rebuild its industrial base and financial capital, the Soviet Union, suffering the most from the war and engaged in a massive effort at reconstruction,

Asia, still on its knees on both sides of the conflict, Japan and China alike near-prostration from a still longer war, and, as the perhaps decisive change, the largely untold story, the breakup of the British Empire and its Imperial Preference System, under sustained pressure by, not simply world events, but the pummeling of the US. The dollar, thank you, Bretton Woods, replaced the pound, as the standard of the international financial system. The stage had been set for the next six decades, a large swath of history, but essential background for where we're at today. America's search for pre-eminence, never abandoned, always burning bright, through alternative strategies from at least the post-Civil War period (and possibly going back to the 1820s and the Monroe Doctrine), illuminates the continuities in foreign policy, with accompanying domestic support, and often to fulfill domestic requirements of industrial development and market penetration, that make intelligible the present-day US global posture. From my angle of vision, Left-of-Center, it is not a pretty picture, lurching toward fascism if not quite there, with foreign overarching domestic policy, militarism its midwife, the offspring a bastardized internationalism as cover for the unilateralism liberated from World War 2, first to face-off against the Soviet Union and then China, as part of preserving capitalism as the viable, yet still not exclusively realized, world system, America at the lead and chief custodian, now, the mopping-up operations to finish the job. Still, Russia and China, their capitalist transformation notwithstanding, in America's crosshairs, even more than ever, not because of the ideological residue of anticommunism, but because of the obstructionism I mentioned: here, we see for the first time, **POWER TRUMPS IDEOLOGY**.

America has become a basket case in world politics. In previous situations of world order, it was not necessary to make transcendent claims of global power. The nation was positioned approximately where it was at, i.e., suited to be, as the sum-total of its political-structural characteristics in relation to the realities of the world system itself, always pushing forward within a crowded global environment of nations themselves possessing hegemonic ambitions. That changed after World War 2, the path steadily clearing for supremacy, at least of the capitalist world, and militarily-economically, the US doing its best to contain the influence of communist nations (at that point, ideology still trumping power-for-its-own-sake) and—with greater success—retard the modernization of Third World nations. Part of the mix was establishing unified regional economies susceptible to and/or beholden to American leadership, from which military alliance systems flowed as being more easily organized. In fact, the order was usually reversed, NATO preceding the EU, a handy outcome of US military assistance programs, but with the end result the same, the integration of military-economic blocs in which American influence predominated and which would also come to serve as proxy forces aiding and giving political support to American intervention.

A lovely, most desirable condition to be in, through much of the remainder of the 20th century, providing the irreducible flooring when, otherwise, America's loathsome engagement in Vietnam, among others, would have diminished its world moral stature and own ideological certainty so necessary to continued military aggrandizement. "Friends and allies" under whatever circumlocution of the moment was like a life raft in a sea of disgrace, as interventions multiplied and the onus of war crimes could be spread over a larger area until no longer noticed. All of this gradually changed, however, as the international system itself proved more unsettling and more challenging. The breakup of the Soviet Union, thought, from the US standpoint, a victory and blessing rolled into one, actually meant Russia's greater integration into the world economy and society, thereby eroding—though not yet fully apparent—America's accomplished dominance, with only one direction to go—down. It is worth repeating: the 21st century has confirmed the existence

of a multi-polar international system, no longer governable through US unilateral action, the result of which has added to its planning and policymaking a desperation (witness the stridency of protest and complaint over Ukraine), irrationality (as in the exaggerated use of counterterrorism as a means of restoring America to the pinnacle of power), and even greater proclivity to intervention and the violation of international law.

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That's where we're at, mid-September 2014. Nothing at the intermediate level of crisis—Ukraine and ISIS chiefly for today in the spotlight—valued for their own sake as candidates for destruction or even as objects of interest, but rather only as stepping stones to the grand showdown with other world powers, Russia and China, and once free from their interference (if one cares to leap over the threat of nuclear annihilation), control over the character and pace of Third World modernization and accommodative stance of other potential rivals—Brazil, India, Japan. The US does not take its decline lightly, more like an enraged bull startled its boasts of Exceptionalism are questioned, and hence, we find, under Obama, but simmering for quite some time (a third-of-a-century at least), the permanent-war doctrine and capacious force thought sufficient to back it up. With that framework for hopefully stimulating further discussion, let me turn to the immediate setting, events and/or statements surrounding Obama's War Speech, Sept. 10, already textually analyzed in my previous CP article, "Obama's War Address: Flim-Flam Patriotism," Sept. 12-14.

On the eve of the speech it was obvious that the focus was shifting away from Ukraine, the Poroshenko-Putin ceasefire agreement a bitter pill for the US to swallow, hoping as it was that confrontation with Russia would be ongoing, sustained, productive of NATO encroachment on Russia's borders (still possible), a sanctions-offensive of further tightening, and a resulting toughening-up of the EU in hopes of crippling Russia's economy and political standing, so that advancement could take place on other fronts, including military and trade pressures on China and freer hand in the Middle East. ISIS was a soft touch for generating propagandistic mileage, meaning intensifying the branding of terrorism on Hamas so that Israel could postpone indefinitely peace talks with the Palestinians, shore up the US-supported government in Iraq, and, still for reasons never clarified, depose Assad in Syria. This, before Obama steps to the podium, a setting having not quite the warmth and charm of FDR's "fireside speeches," but only the long corridor signifying White House authority. Obama, not as POTUS but Commander-in-Chief, a role he increasingly relishes. (By the 12th, the designation was semi-officially, "War on ISIS.")

Already on the 10th, the Editorial Board of the New York Times, immediately following the speech (but with sufficient detail to indicate foreknowledge of its contents), is all over the place—praise, caution, implied exhortation to push harder. It began: "By the time President Obama announced the authorization of airstrikes in Syria Wednesday night, he clearly felt that he had little choice militarily or politically [after resisting US involvement against Assad for three years]"—right from the horse's mouth, yet not a word from The Times that Syrian airstrikes could be a violation of international law. The much-vaunted statement that Syria would agree to the bombing turns out to be false because this was only on condition of cooperation with the US, which Obama flatly refused. He moved now, given ISIS gains and the beheadings, because "he had to expand the fight into a perilous new horizon." Granting this, The Times states that "even if discrete military goals are achieved in the short term, the expansion of the American role [wonderful that it admits as

much] in that regional conflict carries substantial and unpredictable risks that Americans may not be willing to bear.”

Not cancel the operation, instead legitimize it—on the surface a much-needed questioning of Obama’s clear abuse of Executive Authority (mine: as in massive surveillance, drone assassination, and ongoing interventions of varying kinds), but accepting the decision itself provided correct forms are used: “That’s why this open-ended operation, which Mr. Obama says will take time, demands congressional approval, despite his claim of authority to expand the campaign in Iraq and take the fight to Syria under the Iraq war resolution and the War Powers Resolution.” Yes, public opinion polls are with him—but for how long, if there are casualties? Therefore, “Mr. Obama should insist that Congress share responsibility in authorizing the mission.” Substantively, The Times is on board, symbolically about where liberal critics are—just keep it legal. Similarly, “Mr. Obama says that military commanders are free to strike if they identify appropriate targets,” just don’t [mine: for now] go after Assad. “Mr. Obama has said [he] must leave power,” a stated goal, but presumably awaiting later action. ISIS comes first, which won’t be easy, The Times complains, because of the sad state of the Iraqi army and the Syrian rebels—here the silent wish for ground troops, but not overtly recommended, in light of their inadequacies: “To be effective, American airstrikes need to be followed up by ground troops who can recapture and hold territory against ISIS.”

The observation, revealing the critical dimension of those who favor the operation, the Lindsey Grahams of Congress, who want US ground troops, not the measly 475 to be sent thus far, ostensibly for training purposes, shows The Times at its usual though disguised bellicosity, its concern, aside from legality, is the cost involved: “As President Obama moves the nation back onto a war footing, it is also vital to have a cleareyed debate about how expensive that course could be. The Pentagon had a blank check to pay for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The price tag—now more than \$1 trillion—has been a severe burden for the country.” Add the need for “an international coalition that includes Arab states, Western allies and the United States Congress,” and you “have what is crucial to give the American-led operation legitimacy.” All-in-all, a microcosm of the hegemonic mindset in its sophisticated form, duly mindful of the necessity for keeping up appearances.

My New York Times Comment to the editorial, Sept. 11, follows:

Why does international cooperation provide legitimacy for the mission? The entire Iraq war was illegitimate, yet, not called to account, America now continues with airstrikes. To expand airstrikes into Syria is, like with Iraq, to cross borders that we have accused Russia of doing in Ukraine. For the US, air power is the surrogate here for boots on the ground. We violate international law with impunity. Everything about the war with ISIS stinks to high heaven.

Our purpose by announcing its protracted character is to bind future administrations to the doctrine and practice of permanent war. Exactly the procedure followed with the constantly revised hit list sanctioning drone assassination. One does NOT have to defend ISIS to see that it is being used as a paradigm for ongoing intervention, with Russia next and to be followed by China. The formula Obama announced in his speech, “degrade and ultimately destroy,” defines the US global position with respect to all who interfere with our hegemonic claims and aspirations.

The address was so contrived, manipulable, with its shrill patriotic peroration as to deserve the contempt of all peoples—except our own, so bamboozled by the customary rhetoric of patriotism. I wish the Nobel peace prize committee is now wreathing in shame for its utterly poor, unwarranted selection of Obama. America requires war as a shot in the arm for the malaise of consumerism and a nihilist spirit.

Not to be outdone in his warning within enthusiastic approval of the speech and war plan, David Sanger, a leading White House favorite of *The Times*, writes in an article, “Focus on ISIS Stirs Fears That Efforts to Curb Iran Will Recede,” (Sept. 11), that American policy is becoming scattered, losing its punch and effectiveness, implicitly, its world hegemonic posture damaged by this undue concentration. Far from Sanger’s questioning the posture, simply the current priorities: “President Obama’s decision to engage in a lengthy battle to defeat [ISIS] reorders the global priorities of his final years in office. The mystery is whether it will deprive him of the legacy he had once hoped would define his second term, or enhance it instead.” Perhaps the greater mystery: what legacy, unless one means drone assassination, enhanced CIA and paramilitary operations, purposeful war-tensions directed against China and Russia, all of which Sanger sees fit to ignore. His concern exclusively here is Iran: “Until now, Mr. Obama’s No. 1 priority in the Middle East has been clear: preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.” Then the clincher: “Israeli officials, who by happenstance arrived in Washington this week for their regular ‘strategic dialogue,’ immediately argued that ISIS was a distraction from that priority.” If Iran (a situation similar to Assad in Syria) was on the same side as the US in the fight against ISIS, wouldn’t that therefore give it “leverage to extract concessions from the president”? Yuval Steinitz, just hours before the speech, said that ISIS “is a five-year problem,” while “a nuclear Iran is a 50-year problem, with far greater impact.”

If Sanger is a trusted mouthpiece of the administration, he is also adept at accessing, and reflecting the views of, what might best be termed the shadow government, senior foreign-policy advisers bipartisan in character (as is the main thrust of the policy itself). He takes the Israeli position seriously, including the warning that “the new American operation [against ISIS] would bolster Iran’s ambitions for regional dominance,” and points out that under the Bush administration the “decision to invade Iraq 11 years ago distracted it from many things—notably the war in Afghanistan—and Iran used that time to vastly expand its capacity to produce nuclear fuel.” On the other hand, and here one must credit Sanger for mastering the Arcanum of the foreign policy establishment (that aforementioned shadow government) when he turns the analysis around: “But there is a countertheory as well: that a president who for five years made clear that he was looking for a way out of the bog of the Middle East [simply not true, given his embroilment in Iraq, Israel, Syria, and Iran] may have a chance to re-establish American credibility in the region if the strategy he described on Wednesday [the war speech] is well executed.” A big IF which is unlikely of accomplishment, especially in the terms that Obama described, including coalition-building (the tepid response of Arab governments for ground forces, the fighting ability of the Iraqi army, and continuing ill-will created by US financial and military assistance to Israel, negating chances for a peace settlement), as well as—the highly placed critics’ admonition—taking his eyes off the larger picture.

Richard Haass, a crown prince of the shadow government, states: “If this goes well, and the United States is seen as acting effectively, it could generate political capital. There’s the chance it

will be something of an investment in the region. But that is going to require constant rudder checks, to make sure the administration's broader goals do not go off course.'" (Yachtsmen of the world, unite; you have only your mainsail to lose! The utter phoniness of policy discourse—especially when the destruction of human life is involved.) Tom Donilon is one who views Obama as veering off course, and from a Kennan-Kissinger grasp or interpretation of national self-interest, he is right. Obama dissipates the hegemonic vision favored by the real establishment pros—perhaps now a vanishing breed, as specific limited goals takes hold—to the extent that he neglects his Pacific-first strategy. Donilon may be speaking for them: "'We inherited a world in which we were overinvested in the Middle East and underinvested in Asia.' Too, of course, in Russia. To be the world hegemonic leader requires taking in the entire world as one's sphere of dominance.

The "experts" are saying, and Obama concurs (assuming he has ideas of his own), that global supremacy is the margin of safety if America is not to decline economically, and the margin of security, if America is not to be under constant threat of subversion and overthrow, whether communism or terrorism, or a *mélange* of the two. Here Sanger reproduces faithfully the mindset whose position is currently under challenge by the war on ISIS (as opposed to the inarticulate war jocks in Congress, who simply want to beef up US ground forces in attacking ISIS): "Yet over the past year, there has been a broad sense that the effort [containment of China] has stalled, along with several others. And in his speech on Wednesday, Mr. Obama said nothing about the OPPORTUNITY COST [my caps.] of his strategy. How would he ensure that 60 percent of America's military might is in the Pacific—the goal the Pentagon has laid out—while ramping up the fight in Iraq and Syria? How would he square that with the commitment he made just a week ago to bolster NATO in Eastern Europe, part of another long-term effort, to contain Vladimir V. Putin's Russia?" Hiss, boo—both Putin and Russia, particularly in combination, worthy only to be spitted out.

A final word from Sanger, who, wanting to nudge Obama forward, although quite admiring of his record thus far, argues that Obama's "national security team has suggested that the efforts are not mutually exclusive." You can fight China, Russia, and ISIS all at once, perhaps adjusting for different timetables, and up to now the record is splendid: "They note that the Pentagon has maintained a counterterrorism program in Yemen and Somalia,... while the C.I.A. has run a larger operation, under covert-action authorities, against Al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban inside Pakistan. Indeed, to be proud of, targeted assassination, CIA-Special Ops units helping with the targeting, and "covert-action authorities," which might not be favored at The Hague. Yet, good, but still not good enough: "But the goal of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIS requires an effort of a different scale. It goes beyond the 'light footprint' strategy that the president used in his first term, which included hundreds of drone attacks against targets [let's not be squeamish, human targets, vaporized or left as blood spats—but Sanger can't help falling in with the mindset he faithfully presents] in Pakistan and Yemen, a cyberattack on Iran's nuclear facilities, and the use of special forces against pirates, terrorist cells and Osama bin Laden." If this is a light footprint, I'd hate to think of, or be caught in, what a heavy one is like.

My New York Times Comment to the Sanger article, same date, follows:

Always a pleasure to read Sanger, as NYT's favored White House access point, here, a glimpse at what Haass and Donilon are thinking, even Steinitz's sharing of the Israeli perspective. Yes, Sanger is on the right track—misplaced priority diluting fuller US foreign-

policy posture: Iran, Russia, China. But I think on the wrong track in not seeing, from Obama's standpoint, the advantages of going after ISIS. ISIS is secondary; rather, the Wednesday night principle, "destroy and ultimately degrade," is part of a twofold strategy: as with drones and a continually revised hit list, bind future administrations to current policy making; fulfill the larger geopolitical vision, that principle in mind, applied first, to Russia, then China, the ongoing effort to degrade, weaken, and perhaps ultimately dismember each of them, to ensure US global hegemony.

Sanger is right; Obama is greedy (spreading military resources too thinly), and full of HUBRIS, the legacy of preserving American unilateral world dominance, politically, economically, militarily, ideologically. Can't be done, not with the rise of a multi-polar international power system. So, yes, the NATO/Ukraine demarche a flop, Pacific-first strategy and TPP, ditto, all leaving the Behemoth floundering in the cause du jour. The speech was pitiful, short on intelligence, long on patriotism, as though the latter could substitute for the former. Obama is becoming a liability to the foreign-policy establishment.

Putting all the US eggs in one basket is leaving a hole in the bottom, the failure of the hoped-for coalition with Arab partners presently failing to materialize. The Middle East, except for Israel, has seen enough of America. Kerry's trip to the region has a forced quality, evident in the demeanors and handshakes of the officials he met. As Anne Barnard and David Kirkpatrick report in their Times article, "Arabs Give Tepid Support to U.S. Fight Against ISIS," (Sept. 12), the US "is back and getting a less than enthusiastic welcome, with leading allies like Egypt, Jordan and Turkey all finding ways on Thursday [Sept. 11] to avoid specific commitments to President Obama's expanded military campaign against Sunni extremists." Reasons differ, country by country, but they boil down to "increased mistrust" of the US, seeing the bind he's in with respect to Assad, who alone of the nations' leaders is ready unequivocally to fight ISIS, but whom Obama "had already ruled out as a partner for what he described as terrorizing its citizens," which, of course, rebel forces are not guilty of doing. Seeing as well, as King Abdullah of Jordan, saying to Kerry "that the Palestinian cause remains the core of the conflict in the region," which suggests that until that conflict is resolved, there will be ISIS and others like it for some time. And so it went. Obama's words echoed hollow, except in America.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2014

### **The American Corporate State**

History is the plaything of history. No, not a Gertrude Stein wannabe, rather a commonsense point that each generation of historians treats the past, if not from a presentist standpoint, then at least reading into it inescapable premises and biases (we call that, "interpretation") that cannot but help to color the account. Some of these biases become "official" or semi-permanent because they contribute to the national mythology, in the case of America, of democracy and service on behalf of the public welfare. At times, the fulcrum is the nation, but not infrequently, the real fulcrum on which historical interpretation rests is capitalism itself, nation and capitalism becoming interchangeable when the mythology works and runs in high gear.



Such is the context for the structural framework best characterizing modern (post-Civil War to the present, and very likely, much beyond) US economic history, i.e., to all intents and purposes, the systemic integration of the two parallel structures of power, so that government, in the name of the Regulatory State, actually runs interference for business (include here, importantly, banking) through encouraging and facilitating trends toward monopolization, elimination of internecine competition, by letting the largest firms draw up the ground-rules (enforced by government), even sector-by-sector, under which they operate, and a foreign policy—beyond the militarization of capitalism as such, via vast “defense” appropriations and securing the nation on a permanent-war footing—geared to market-and-investment penetration, maintenance of favorable international monetary and banking standards, and, not least, the assured supply of necessary natural resources and raw materials, often conveniently left in situ as part of outsourcing. Ownership trumps location in the manufacturing process.

In the modern era, again, particularly, the US, capital becomes indistinguishable from government power, except that in fact the latter’s purpose is to serve the former and therefore willingly accepts a subordinate position in the relationship. Nothing about, or in, the political process upsets or denies this proposition: the State is, first and foremost, a Capitalist State, where one ends and the other begins the subject of exquisite sophistry and make-believe conflict. With this as short prologue, I would like to go into the status of government regulation in America today, using a comparatively minor example now in the news—the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)—thanks to the New York Times, Hilary Stout, Danielle Ivory, and Rebecca Ruiz’s article, “Regulator Slow to Respond to Deadly Vehicle Defects,” (Sept. 15), the agency a microcosm of America’s regulatory intent of non-regulation, with the more famous examples, beginning with the Interstate Commerce Commission (1887) and the Federal Reserve System (1913) still more extensively, though perhaps disguised, doing the work of the business system: like the local constable, protect and serve, with the added features, consolidation, solidification, and, as practices grow more outrageous and onerous, conferral of the government’s seal of approval to give assurance and ward off criticism.

Gabriel Kolko, in two early, conceptually brilliant, books, *Triumph of Conservatism* and *Railroads and Regulation*, done before his writings on US foreign policy, laid out the framework of interpenetration, with Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as seminal figures in furthering the rationalization of industry and banking, respectively, the earlier ICC already an indication of the systemic harmonization of government and business at the heart of American capitalist development. Forget *laissez-faire*, forget TR the trustbuster, forget Wilson the liberal idealist (save as revealing the true colors of American liberalism, even this early), and forget FDR and the New Deal, despite my deep attachment to it on so much else, for the National Recovery Administration, which, through government code authorities, significantly advanced monopolization. Those of you who saw the first installment of the PBS’s series, *The Roosevelts*, should know at the outset the whitewash of TR’s murderous, yes, murderous, instincts (not shown, except qua taxidermy, itself his entrance into eugenics and applause for what was coming out of neighboring Cold Springs Harbor; for TR, in the Dakota Badlands, was not just pure exuberance and athleticism—he said that his Rough Riders would love the chance to take a shot at the Haymarket rioters, and “my men shoot straight.” Let’s see what they do with the Great White Fleet, imperialism, and the glorification of war.

In other words, history circa 2014 passes over interpenetration as the thematic core of US capitalist development, a normalization of the Age of Deregulation the principal element left out so as objectively to obfuscate the relation of mutual dependence and what this portends for society as a whole: widening class differentiation, a more submissive working class, admiration for the Titans of industry and banking, and, in the background, war, intervention, massive surveillance, and easy access to the White House for the powers that be. The inner core of a business civilization blossoms forth as what I believe, based on the German example of interpenetration to the same end of business growth (with the State ultimately leaping beyond to assert its own independent identity—after having done the work for capitalism by means of organizing the Nazi economic fronts), is fascism, not presumably Huey Long- or Joe McCarthy-style, but corporate America reaching its full potential-style. Again, Kolko repays careful study, a radical when to be clear-headed was still possible, more so than today. One must also recognize the dedicated and courageous work of Ralph Nader to automotive safety; my own analysis, as seen above, may parallel his own, but from a somewhat different, essentially systemic, vantage point.

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The article begins, unintentionally, on a droll note, as though wisecracking in an Improv club with resort to macabre humor: “General Motors published an article in February [2014] on its Chevrolet website trumpeting an achievement certain to sell a lot of cars. In 2014 Chevys had earned more five-star overall safety ratings in a new car assessment program than had any other brand. The NEXT DAY [my caps.], G.M. began recalling millions of its cars for a deadly ignition defect, and by August, six of the eight five-star Chevrolet models had been recalled for a variety of safety issues, including defects in air bags, brakes and steering. Five had been recalled multiple times.” The song Frankie used to sing in my youth, “What a difference a day makes, 24 little hours...,” except that not falling in love but falling into an early grave would better complete the thought. GM is acting as expected (i.e., for profit), but how explain NHTSA, which awarded the “stellar rankings” and “is mandated by Congress to ensure the safety of automobiles”? As the reporters write, the agency “has a record of missteps [criminal negligence seems more to the point] that goes well beyond its failure to detect an ignition switch defect in several models of G.M. cars now linked to at least 13 deaths.

The box score of carnage, matched by the agency’s indifference to the industry’s state of play, as in the cavalier disregard of complaints, reciprocated in turn by companies’ high-powered legal staffs to knock these complaints down (along with effectively pressuring NHTSA to sit on the results of investigation, if ever undertaken) usually before they get to trial, makes for a cozy *modus operandi* (defining regulation) and a structural *modus vivendi* (defining the way of life of advanced capitalism, especially in America) so ingrained in the business mindset, then shared by the general public, as to render the Corporate State near-axiomatic. The Times here does yeomanly service (I bow to none in my criticism of Times’ editorial board, most of its op-ed contributors, and several of its more highly-placed Washington reporters, but it is a serious mistake not to recognize the writings of certain of its investigative reporters, as now, who, as also in the field of national security, uncover the darker, more contemptible side of USG operations) in the article: “[Its investigation] into the agency’s handling of major safety defects over the past decade found that it frequently has been slow to identify problems, tentative to act and reluctant to employ its full legal

powers against companies.” Box score thus far: no runs, no hits, multiple and grave errors (at the cost of human life, as company profit sheets until very recently were largely unaffected).

The reporters worked prodigiously, researching in a wide range of document collections and conducting numerous interviews (and why not?, given the hidden nature of both companies’ and agency’s holdings and rude response to requests for information), and they found that “in many of the major vehicle safety issues of recent years—including unintended acceleration in Toyotas, fires in Jeep fuel tanks and air bag ruptures in Hondas as well as the G.M. ignition defect—the agency did not take a leading role until well after the problems had reached a crisis level, safety advocates had sounded alarms and motorists were injured or died.” To its credit, NHTSA was not nationalist-chauvenist, protecting foreign companies with equal fervor as American: capitalism blesses all. Too much, sordidness compounded: the funds for investigating safety defects, 1% of total budget, while “the rating of new cars,” they point out, is “a favorite marketing tool for automakers,” and meanwhile the agency “has been so deferential to automakers that it made a key question it poses after fatal accidents optional—a policy it is only now changing after inquiries from The Times.” Sorry, gnashing of teeth. The driver, e.g., of a 2005 Camry was injured, her passenger killed, in 2007, when the car “suddenly accelerated through an intersection and hit an embankment.” In 2010 NHTSA “inquired about the cause of the accident” (it took its own sweet time), Toyota replying: ““Toyota understands that this request is optional and respectfully declines to respond at this time.”” Only three years later did the families win a suit for compensatory damages.

America corporate rapine (here plundering the consumer’s pocketbook and trust, and the nation’s faith in the integrity of its government) and murder continues, always the same, suppression of knowledge of the defects—the agency fully cooperative in turning the other cheek, assuming it cares at all. Take the Chrysler Jeep: “After Chrysler balked last year at the regulator’s suggested 2.7 million vehicle recall for exploding gas tanks in its Jeeps, the federal agency scaled back its request by 1.1 million cars. It also agreed to Chrysler’s demand that the automaker not be required to say the vehicles had a safety defect or that the automaker was at fault.” Small potatoes? They go on: “The agency has linked 51 deaths and at least two serious injuries to the defect over 14 years.” Yet, silence is golden. Ditto, Honda, now though, it’s rupturing air bags, to which “the agency cut short an investigation,” declaring there was ““insufficient information”” to warrant taking action. That was 2010; four years later, Honda and ten other companies using the defective air bag recalled more than 13 million cars. I like the government response, not unlike the Obama administration on drone warfare—death a meeting ground for business and government, shielded in opaqueness: “The agency declined to make regulators available for interviews, agreeing only to reply to written questions.” Better still, its response to queries: ““N.H.T.S.A. has a proven record of aggressively investigating and pursuing recalls.” It goes on, self-righteousness hath no shame: “N.H.T.S.A. evaluates each potential safety defect issue based on the particular circumstances involved and does not have a set threshold for opening defect investigations beyond our core mission of reducing fatalities and injuries from motor vehicle crashes.” Translated into English: No investigations unless pressured to do so. No criteria of wrongdoing. Box score: tossed out of the majors, relegated to semipro ranks, on the automakers’ own teams via the revolving door.

The picture is clear, the rotten core of the regulatory apparatus in America, whichever way one turns, automotive safety hardly being the exception to an otherwise stringent pattern to safeguard the public welfare. I linger on, fascinated by the horror: “In the late 1990s, it [the agency] was

sharply criticized by lawmakers and consumer advocates for failing to detect a pattern of highway rollovers in Ford Explorers with Firestone tires that was eventually tied to 271 fatalities.” Despite efforts (which I frankly suspect) by Congress in 2000 “to give the agency more leverage over the auto industry and better access to its accident data,” the old adage apparently holds, that you can lead a horse to water.... And the reporters themselves conclude, “Yet since then [the 2000 legislation], the agency has continued to show sluggishness in its investigations, feeding a perception that it does not stand up to the politically influential, multibillion-dollar automobile industry until it is forced to do so by outside pressure.”

Even then, don’t bet your life-savings. The record of GM in particular sticks in the craw: “The Times reviewed more than 12,000 consumer complaints to the federal agency about power, speed and ignition problems in the G.M. models recalled for ignition-related problems.” The delay and the brush-off followed: “The first stalling complaints arrived in 1997, and starting in May 2000, the agency consistently told drivers that there was insufficient evidence to open an investigation, even when drivers presented similar complaints that they had found on the Internet and on the agency’s own website.” Then, a list of horror stories, capped by the reporters’ comment: “As of this month [Sept. 2014], G.M. has recalled nearly 16.5 million vehicles for ignition-related problems, including 2.6 million for the defective switch that the automaker acknowledges IT KNEW ABOUT FOR YEARS. [my caps.] In almost all of the ignition recalls, the problem could result in moving cars suddenly shutting off, disabling air bags and other key systems like power steering and power brakes.” When one driver’s car, a 2010 Chevy Impala, shut down its power near Tuscaloosa, she wrote to GM. “A division chief wrote back that, based on a review of its database, there was ‘insufficient evidence to warrant opening a safety defect investigation.’”

Another driver, summer of 2005, pitch black conditions, on an interstate in rural West Virginia, this time the “car shut off and she had to wrestle the wheel to bring it to the side of the road. Trucks whizzed by in the dark, and her 2004 Pontiac Grand Prix shook as they did. In the back seat of the car, her youngest daughter began to cry. ‘You can see how a child would be frightened.... I was afraid, too.’” She wrote to the agency, regulators replying a month later in almost identical language to that used by GM in the other case: “a review of their database ‘revealed insufficient evidence to warrant opening a safety defect investigation.’” (The reporters missed the seeming coincidence.) I say this only partially tongue-in-cheek: Which poses the greater threat to America, ISIS or General Motors, is a query deserving of a national conversation. Finally, to David Friedman, present NHTSA administrator, who claims not to have known that the agency had subpoena-issuing powers. The blind are leading the seeing in a mad rush to the bank, or rather, both are keen-sighted, regulators embracing regulated in a Grand Feast at the expense of the people.

My New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

“Safety sells.” So does prostitution, in this case a federal government agency charged with ensuring the SAFETY of the American public, has embraced perpetrators of wrongdoing—a sweetheart relationship—in violation of its sacred mission. Clean out the Augean stables—a director who claims ignorance of subpoena powers, an agency devoting 1% of its budget to safety defects, a staff more adept at stonewalling the public than performing investigative duties. NHTSA probably has a rubber stamp, marked “insufficient information,” on every desktop.

Surprising? No. Beginning with TR (notwithstanding the PBS program on the Roosevelts), the structural paradigm has been, the interpenetration of business and government as the essence of the regulatory framework. Regulation, not to regulate, but rather, as here, with the rating system, to confer the government seal of approval on corporate production. Not just NHTSA, but going back to basics, the Federal Reserve System (govt. appendage of the banking industry), SEC, FDA, a harlotry of public service.

Will this excellent article of The Times produce results, changes, AUTHENTIC regulation? Highly doubtful. This is the way American business/banking operates, in collusion with a government anxious to do its bidding. And yes, the revolving door—a soft-cushion remunerative landing after departing the respective agencies. Institutional gangsterism under the waving American flag.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

### **Prelude to War**

ISIS, WMD of our time. To light a fire: White House, gathering within itself the military and intelligence communities, sends out Gen. Dempsey and Sec. Hagel to testify before Senate Armed Services—feeler about war while Obama mouths peace. The old trick, a trial balloon, while POTUS sits pretty and has deniability. The important thing, build war sentiment, feed the public a steady diet of war propaganda. It is working.

A "war-weary public," as is often contended? Nonsense. America hungers for war, needs war to feel muscular; "shock-and-awe" air campaigns, whomever directed against, testifies to US greatness. War is thought essential to a prosperous economy. Peace, ever since TR, is thought ignoble—also perhaps tilting capitalism toward stagnation.

Why deny American superiority? Obama rides the crest of the ethnocentric/xenophobic wave, ideological crosscurrents that spell e-x-c-e-p-t-i-o-n-a-l-i-s-m. Bingo. The corporate state subsumes its militarization. Obama has transformed himself from POTUS to Commander-in-Chief: vacillation, the Hamlet-like façade, is for the purpose of concealing a seething underneath.

The White House thinks ahead. It is more ambitious in its war planning than previous administrations. Obama surrounds himself with the best, would-be Clausewitzs with a geopolitical vision of US unilateral control over the global system. Everything is possible through air power. Before, he leaned on Special Ops and the CIA, drone assassination his method of choice. Now, his General Staff is getting itchy, eager to display their wares, show their stuff.

Assassination is too slow. Bomb everywhere, "friends and allies" a reliable cheering section (so long as ground troops are not their own). They, the sweet EU-NATO nexus, also help to neutralize international organization. Today, then, ISIS, and if possible, Assad; tomorrow, what remains of a resistant world. Who cannot see Russia and China in the American cross-hairs?

Whomever cannot is not a fit candidate for office, EITHER party, and certainly not, Obama's national-security team. ISIS is a mere stepping stone. To what? First, stabilization of the Middle East around an Israel-centered formula of non-compromise on Palestine, an accommodative peace with Egypt, Jordan, and the Saudis, as the domestication of the Arab Spring to crush Iran. Second,

Europe's solidification into an anti-Russian coalition of power, aimed at further dismemberment. Third, a more drastic version of the same with respect to China.

Obama's Pacific-first strategy, embodied in the Pentagon's 60-40 split in the allocation of "assets" to that region, signals confrontation at its highest. And the prize, the greatest: undisputed global power on a permanent basis. And with it, the superimposition of American values—unrestrained capitalism in all its wish-fulfillment forms—on the world system. Look for an international division of labor, outsourcing to the third decimal point in the search for cheap labor, preferably near the source of raw materials for production.

Look also for stability, i.e., counterrevolution in advance of anything happening. A world without socialism; equally, one without obstacles to American commercial-financial penetration. Ditto, opposition forces and/or politics questioning US (moral) leadership. Bring Kipling up-to-date: the world never sets on American military bases. That already accomplished, it will be necessary to supplement with more, always more, as US controls tighten, the propaganda of domination begins to wear thin, and the "natives" (including formerly top-ranked states) become restive.

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So, Dempsey and Hagel on the Hill spreading the message of war, covering the ass of Obama so as to make him look reluctant and forced into a decision he had already made. This is a delicate maneuver. It must not look like insubordination. Only humility before the Chief in giving advice that is their sworn duty to provide—however presumably distasteful to them in discharging their responsibilities. This is as intended, giving their words greater solemnity and effectiveness.

Here New York Times reporters Mark Landler and Jeremy Peters, in their article, "U.S. General Open to Ground Forces in Fight Against ISIS in Iraq," (Sept. 16), sketch out, maybe inadvertently, the game plan. Ground forces prepared, ready to be deployed, IF necessary, the "if" a matter of presidential discretion, and we know our man in these contexts. Already we see, Iraqi troops appear untrainable, Syrian rebels, unreliable, thirty nations in the Great Meeting of Support, rushing for the door when it comes to ground troops.

The reporters: "President Obama's top military adviser said Tuesday [9/ 16] that he would recommend deploying United States forces in ground operations against Islamic extremists in Iraq if airstrikes proved insufficient, opening the door to a riskier, more expansive American combat role than the president has publicly outlined." Mine: sweet music to members of the Committee (e.g., McCain, in a statement to the press, Casey, over BBC), bipartisan to the core—and if anything, criticizing Obama for not acting sooner (knowing that with Dempsey's appearance, Obama is acting).

One senses the "American-led coalition" is a straw man, one Dempsey dutifully expressed confidence in, but with crossed fingers. "My view at this point," he said, "is that this coalition is the appropriate way forward. I believe that will prove true. But if it fails to be true, and there are threats to the United States, then I, of course, would go back to the president and make a recommendation that may include the use of U.S. military ground forces."

The problem is, the war-propaganda machinery is working overtime to manufacture the threat. How long before the recommendation follows, and Obama, recommendation in hand, reluctantly concludes on the expansion of war? Note: already the White House has described the conflict as a war on ISIS. (More on this at the end of the NYT article) Insubordination? No, part of the game plan: “General Dempsey acknowledged that this would run counter to the president’s policy, but he said, ‘He has told me as well to come back to him on a case-by-case basis.’” Perfect cover.

Fearing the alleged unpopularity of another war (have the last ones stopped?), Landler-Peters tread lightly: Dempsey’s “statement lays bare the challenge” Obama faces “in selling an expanded military campaign to a war-weary [?!] American public.” Obama promised no ground troops against ISIS; yet, Dempsey pointed out, “the realities of a prolonged campaign...could make such a hands-off approach untenable, particularly if the battle against the militants moves into densely populated cities where airstrikes are less effective and the chances of civilian casualties are much higher.”

Ergo, the initial demur: “The White House insisted on Tuesday that Mr. Obama was not shifting his policy and that General Dempsey was not out of sync with his commander in chief.” Heaven forbid. (But why testify in this way before Armed Services, unless to drop the hint of action?) Josh Earnest, the press secretary, followed up to reporters with the inevitable qualification: “It’s the responsibility of the president’s military advisers to plan and consider all the wide range of contingencies. It is also the responsibility of the commander in chief to set out a clear policy.” No denial, exactly.

In fact, quite the contrary. Although the reporters in their journalistic innocence may not see the import and substance of the timing, Obama’s actions are telling: “On Wednesday (today, 9/17, one day after Dempsey testifying), Mr. Obama is scheduled to get a briefing from his military commanders at the Pentagon’s Central Command headquarters in Tampa, Fla. (Superb p.r. in its symbolism –you come to them, not them to you) The rare visit is described by White House officials as part of his effort TO MOBILIZE PUBLIC SUPPORT for the mission.” (My caps.)

Mission unspecified, as the underlying beating of the bushes (propaganda) goes on. It is not addiction to conspiracy theory to suggest, as with so much else about Obama, the timing is orchestrated to add to the momentum for war. In addition, his Tampa journey is to smooth ruffled feathers, an appeasement of the military, because he appointed Gen. John Allen (ret.) “in charge of the operations” as the “special envoy” to the coalition “fighting the Islamic State” and, horrors, to be based in the State Department. Let it not be said that Obama is indifferent to the morale of his General Staff.

Then, finally, the semantic mishmash. Press Secretary Earnest: the US is at war “‘in the same way we are at war with Al-Qaeda and its affiliates.’” Kerry, in the Middle East, lining up support, not at war, “then he was forced to backtrack.” I give the final word to Peter Feaver, a former national-security aide to Clinton and Bush 2: “‘These terms mean things to the military, and have implications for resource commitments. If you’re using the term war, that implies a level of PRESIDENTIAL COMMITMENT. The acid question is whether it is higher than Obama’s own commitment.’” (My caps.)

When the two commitments coincide, as I believe they have, watch out. Welcome to, prelude to war.

My New York Times Comment to the Landler-Peters article, Sept. 16, follows:

Obama has ruled out ground troops. Does anyone believe him—and should they? His pattern is, deny but send up authoritative spokesmen to the Hill, build up public sentiment, and REVERSE the position quickly when no one seems to be looking—or rather is becoming habituated to permanent war as the path to national honor.

Has USG tried to talk to ISIS? Of course not: to talk is weakness, esp. unworthy of the Global Leader. Obama has proven by his record that he thrives on war. War commands political respect. more deaths than ISIS ever will.

Dempsey and Hagel are the current face of the administration, replacing John Brennan of waterboarding fame. Time to activate the troops, America's moral fiber is lessening. Right back to TR, global hegemony, militarism, in sum, the American Way of Death.

SEPTEMBER 19, 2014

### **America's Global Agenda**

Even principled conservatives (yes, there are some, unlike principled liberals, a species near extinction) are beginning to shudder at Obama's war-intensity and expansion of Executive power. George Will, not my favorite, had cogent things to say about Obama's maneuvering into war with ISIS. His Washington Post article, "Obama is defying the Constitution on war," (Sept. 17), states the US last declared war in 1942 (on Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) as part of WWII, and continues: "Today's issue is not whether to declare war but only whether the president should even seek congressional authorization for the protracted use of force against the Islamic State." Implication: the declaration, which can be skipped, is a self-evident power of the president, thereby making congressional authorization a mere formality, if sought at all.

Our Con Law POTUS, even more than his predecessors (Bush at least had John Yoo to lie for him, with spurious Office of Legal Counsel rationales), rapes the fundamental law of the land. This is not surprising, given his denial of habeas corpus rights to detainees, and now, drastically enlarged the violation of civil liberties through his massive surveillance of the American people. Current NSA policy and John Brennan's promotion of torture are fit companions to his thinking and policies on behalf of the American people. From this overall context of despicement for the law, shared, but not carried to such lengths, by his predecessors, we have his high-tech fascination with getting away with murder (literally), as in drone assassination.

That is what I mean by sterilized armed conflict, put on already in airstrikes against ISIS: clean, polished, sophisticated, obliterative, Attila the Hun as Peace Nobelist. Here I credit George Will with insight and conscience, both seriously deficient in Washington, even though he tends to think in terms of formalities; not the act of war, but its proper constitutional authorization, most drives his criticism. In today's sorry political culture, we should be thankful even for crumbs.

"Promising to 'destroy' this group with the help of 'a broad coalition' of 'partners,'" he writes, "President Obama said last week, 'I welcome congressional support for this effort.' He obviously thinks such support is optional, partly because this 'effort,' conducted by U.S. combat aircraft, is something other than war. There he goes again." Exactly, there he goes again, the ISIS business



merely the last (thus far) in a whole string of violations, using, as in Libya, airstrikes to circumvent the clear meaning and understanding of international law.

Airstrikes are magical, as though not, like ground forces, crossing borders, and as though aggression stops at 25,000 feet. Collateral damage, the phrase itself sounds innocuous enough. Put on your surgical gloves, press buttons, in the case of drone warfare, thousands of miles away, and be lulled to sleep by an Eichmann-like bureaucratic calm. Sanitized killing, whether from above or afar, nonetheless requires effort: Obama's promise du jour of no ground forces against ISIS makes no mention of Special Ops, CIA, or other modes of favored paramilitary engagement. (When we hear the term "advisers," think Korean War, a status widely employed since to disguise regularized, hardcore military operations and personnel.)

In Libya, Will points out, the bombing took place over seven months with no authorization of any kind, Obama's lawyers contending that thousands of air strikes "did not constitute 'hostilities,'" and he quotes Ilya Somin of George Mason School of Law: "Claims that large-scale air attacks don't count as warfare were specious when the administration trotted them out in defense of its intervention in Libya in 2011; and they have not improved with age." Jack Goldsmith of Harvard Law, himself implicated in shaping some of these rationales before going to Cambridge, and therefore a shrewd inside-observer, says, Will quotes, "Obama has become 'a matchless war-powers unilateralist' who 'removed all practical limits' on presidential war-making when exercised, as in Libya, for proclaimed 'humanitarian ends.'"

Obama claims that as commander-in-chief he has inherent powers to authorize bombing ISIS in Syria, and goes further, citing the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) against ISIS, when, again Will, AUMF was specific to al-Qaeda, whereas ISIS "did not exist in 2001 and was born in hostility to the perpetrator of the 2001 attacks, al-Qaeda." But that's what White House lawyers are for. Hence, using AUMF is unjustified for advancing a protracted war, whether air strikes or ground forces, nicely put in this context by Goldsmith as "'presidential unilateralism masquerading as implausible statutory interpretation.'" My translation: Obama, international outlaw.

Significantly, no White House Legal Counsel opinion has yet been forthcoming on airstrikes against ISIS. Bring back John Yoo from Berkeley, which is only fitting as Obama plays piggy-back jumping over Bush. Finally here, Will quotes Bruce Ackerman of Yale Law, who "says that nothing Bush attempted 'remotely compares in IMPERIAL HUBRIS' [my caps.] with Obama's 'assertion of unilateral war-making authority.'" For Will—the conservative—to be so critical, imagine what a radical might say: fascism, in process or already present.

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Momentum for war is building. Things are marvelously heating up, the compression of events, plainly orchestrated by the White House, Dempsey and Hagel before Senate Armed Services Tuesday, Obama at MacDill Air Force Wednesday, the House vote, same day, Kerry soon at the UN, a veritable bandwagon of support, "friends and allies," between 30-40, standing in the wings, all that is missing...armed forces on the ground. I've already discussed Dempsey in a CP article. Let's jump into midweek events with the House approval of arming the Free Syrian Army. Senate is expected today, 9/18, to follow, but with one corrective. Obama, with full bipartisan cooperation in the House, had the debate and vote associated with the stopgap spending bill to fund the federal government, though in separate votes, while in the Senate, the two measures are connected.

There is nothing like the patriotic glory of war to bring the parties together. After Obama “personally pleaded for support,” the House voted 273-156 “to authorize the training and arming of Syrian rebels to confront” ISIS. This is a comfortable margin in light of party battles, logjam, stalemate on a wide range of issues, none of which has a bearing on war, intervention, assassination, full-spectrum adherence to imperialism and militarism. Consensus reflects what really matters to the nation. Peace and social justice are NOT part of the mix, except that in their case neither party has a positive record on these and related issues (corporate regulation, strict environmental controls, vital social safety net), thus if you will a negative consensus dedicated to monopoly capital, which helps to fuel the positive consensus on war.

Times reporter Jonathan Weisman’s article, “House Votes to Authorize Aid to Syrian Rebels in ISIS Fight,” (Sept. 17), an accurate mouthful, states that the measure “took on outsize importance and was infused with drama, reflecting the tension and ambiguity of members wary of the ultimate path to which any war vote could lead.” It seems no-one believed Obama’s protestations about no boots on the ground. War is fully expected on (that detestable phrase) “both sides of the aisle,” and by supporters and critics alike. The latter included negative votes, supporters who didn’t think Obama went far enough, and opponents fearful of the war consequences but not very forceful in their opposition. If ISIS could be eliminated with one nuclear blast, there would be few teary eyes in Washington, except for concern its absence would remove a prop for counterterrorism, surveillance, assassination, military appropriations, the operative doctrine of permanent war.

Whatever happens, ISIS don’t self-destruct. The US needs your threat-presence to validate its global leadership, until—as in the song—the next one comes along. Or, is manufactured. Meanwhile, Obama at MacDill, the staged background of servicemembers: “The American forces that have been deployed to Iraq do not and will not have a combat mission. I will not commit you and the rest of our armed forces to fighting another ground war in Iraq.” What Weisman called “theater” in preparation for the debate and vote, Obama, Biden, others manning the phones calling for support (Do not undercut the president in wartime), somewhat weakens the sincerity and strength of the promise.

Ah, the Voices for Freedom. Here is Ruppertsberger, ranking Democrat on House Intelligence: “Obama is our commander in chief. You don’t weaken the commander in chief when we’re in a serious crisis.” And McCarthy, Republican and majority leader: “I know that many of us in the chamber, from both sides of the aisle, believe the president’s strategy should do more to eradicate these extremists from the earth. But despite these reservations—reservations that I share—we must support this amendment and take this first step.” Another Republican: “What would our allies think if we rejected the president’s request?” With statements like this from both sides of the aisle, opposition to ground forces and all-out war would be paper-thin, easily overcome by the patriotic hysteria worked up by government and the media, and the predisposition, already found, of a nation losing ground as the once supreme arbiter of world politics and military affairs.

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Then on the same day, we see Obama at MacDill Air Force Base, the occasion, along with the House vote and the previous day’s Dempsey-Hagel testimony, a perfect demonstration of wartime symbolism. He addresses the troops, providing assurances of no ground war to the public, and meets with leaders of his military command, but also brings along his national-security advisers

(including Hagel), so that we have a consummation of the marriage of the Military and the Executive. Obama appears increasingly needful of the military glorification of his own person.

Times reporter Michael Shear, in his article, “Obama Insists U.S. Will Not Get Drawn Into Ground War in Iraq,” fails to account for the intensive stage-management and military-executive interplay, but he is right in emphasizing the electricity in the air: “Aides described the president’s visit to the base as part of an effort to convince Americans of the need to confront the extremists in the Middle East. They said Mr. Obama was in a period of intensive focus on national security... [beginning with last Wednesday’s speech] and will continue next week in New York when Mr. Obama attends the annual meeting of world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly.”

According to a NYT/CBS poll Shear includes in his article, showing only one-third of the public approving Obama’s conduct of foreign policy, the negative rating concerns lack of stronger military action taken against ISIS, in other words, open sesame for the reversal of policy just announced.

A further straw in the wind (more like the whole haystack flying about) is the position taken by General Ray Odierno, a bellwether of military planning, presently Army chief of staff, who spoke to The Times and other news organizations on the 18th, one day after Dempsey, in Wiesbaden. Times reporter Alison Smale was present. In her article, “U.S. Army Chief Says Ground Troops Will Be Needed Against ISIS,” one senses a palace revolt of sorts, the military chafing at the bit, while, as with Dempsey’s testimony hinting at ground forces in Iraq, the White House is quick to deny insubordination on both their parts. I take this as illustration, instead, of movement in the intended direction, ISIS’s utter destruction, which Obama signaled in his earlier speech. Neither Dempsey nor Odierno expressed confidence in air power or in the mobilization of an international coalition, leaving therefore a big fat question mark concerning the use of American ground forces.

Odierno is shrewd. Smale reports that he believed “the battle against Islamic State jihadis would only succeed with the use of ground forces,” but “he was careful not to specify that those ground troops had to be American.” Airstrikes thus far “have halted the advance of the Islamic State,” but ultimately, “‘you’ve got to have ground forces that are capable of going in and rooting them out.’” Significantly, he held that ISIS “cannot be allowed to have a safe haven across the border in Syria.” My translation: at the very least, airstrikes in Syria, and with that precedent, reason found for the ground invasion, Janus-faced, to be sure, directed against both ISIS and Assad. The article concludes: “He [Odierno] did not comment on whether there would be a need for military action against the jihadis if they pull back to Syria, but he did specify that they should not be allowed a safe haven anywhere. The Islamic State poses ‘a long-term threat’ to Europe and the United States, he said.”

My New York Times Comment on the Weisman article, Sept. 18, follows:

Free Syrian Army—who thought up that name? Public relations by the Obama administration in the rush to ANOTHER war. The authoritarian mindset: You must support your Commander-in-Chief, for what would the world otherwise think? What would happen to American global leadership? Congress in lockstep. Threat to the Homeland. Forward march.

America hungers for war—polls criticize Obama for not going far enough. Air power is the magical nostrum, a sanitization of death that, because at a distance, weighs on no-one’s

conscience. Curtis LeMay is a choir boy compared with present advocates of warfare. Bomb, bomb our way to Virtue.

Obama promises no ground forces—unless of course circumstances change (circumstances we define to suit our pre-planned policies). Like drone assassination, military policy/action falls on deaf ears, America enclosed in a wall of deniability.

The Middle East is merely one of many war fronts. One that focuses attention, and detracts from critical awareness of the wider geopolitical framework. Global hegemony is not a slogan but a fact, or rather, aspiration, the RENEWAL of supremacy in the world system as the global order itself, despite US wishes and efforts, is becoming multi-polar.

Obama sends his proxies, Dempsey, Hagel, Kerry into the fray, just as America enlists its proxies, the international coalition, to do battle. For what? We are never told, but must take POTUS on faith—an unwise thing to do. War Nobelist to the rescue.

SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

### **US/Israel-Created Middle East Tensions**

The US designedly engenders political-diplomatic conflict wherever it goes and whenever it can, not because it is integrally infantile or churlish, but because its geopolitical strategy of divide-and-conquer is integral to its ambition for unilateral global hegemony. Even divide-and-conquer is mere surface, the instrumental framework within which to realize an ideological deeply-ingrained counterrevolutionary ethos and world posture, the half-century thread of anticommunism never lost and recently transmuted into a doctrine of permanent war tightly attached to counterterrorism.

America has managed, under a wholly bipartisan political tent, to syncretize, in desperation of losing its cherished place of military-commercial-financial supremacy in the world, somewhat unrelated elements which define a total historical-political position of REACTION, the more misleading and insidious because parading under the banner of liberalism, as in liberal humanitarianism. Although there is nothing new about the politicization of Exceptionalism in marking American expansion, this time in the consecutive march toward hegemony we find that the stakes are higher.

World power is becoming crowded at the top. And neither the military establishment nor the national-security advisers, working together in harmony (a Military-Executive aggrandizement of power), is oriented/dedicated to other than war, and quite simplistic in their respective planning for its fighting, so that the current turmoil in the Middle East should not be surprising. “Blowback” is not descriptively sufficient; US/Israel jointly have created a seething cauldron, the possible locus for WWII, particularly because the region—despite oil reserves—is only a pawn, an immediate sphere of influence, in the main theater of confrontation.

America prioritizes Russia and China singly and together as Evil Incarnate, each to be contained, isolated, drastically weakened, Islamic militancy now and in future the sideshow, distraction, indeed pretext, for the full militarization of American society in going after bigger game. Syria and Ukraine are identified as geostrategic opportunities having sequential import, under the cover of antiterrorism placing decisive military “assets” in closer proximity to the Enemy. First, ISIS (today

the New York Times announces that there are still darker forces than ISIS waiting to strike America) and, perhaps under the guise of “mission creep,” for which the public has been prepared already, then the maneuvering and jostling to set up the wider staging ground... at the risk of nuclear war.

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The New York Times editorial, “The Unlikeliest of Coalitions,” (Sept. 20), credits the implosive character of the region, but—as usual—without seeking underlying causes, rather, the Editorial Board head down, plunging ahead to solidifying a coalition conducive to achieving American goals. Yet, even these goals, degrading and destroying ISIS, mean, once accomplished, a return to business-as-usual, protection of the Homeland having wider implications, the perceived Ultimate Showdown, local skirmishes giving way to head-to-head confrontation. Here the Ukraine crisis has been useful both in the demonization of Putin and Russia and the hoped for solidification of EU-NATO as “friends and allies” in the greater struggle for freedom and democracy.

China cannot be approached without at least the partial vanquishing of Russia, not only dangerous but self-defeating, because pressure on Russia only drives it and China closer together, overcoming decades of their mutual distrust (under Stalin and Mao) and competitiveness. In its rush to restore US unilateral dominance of the world system in face of the clear decentralization of the international order, America is at pins and needles at how to proceed. The Middle East provides a good start. Subservience to Israeli needs, wishes, and strategic assumptions is a constant and also near-adequate explanatory guide to US actions, but even there, Israel becomes more of a convenience to be accommodated into the American ideological-systemic blueprint than purist goal for its own sake. Symbiosis is a wondrous state for power politics, in this case, a tried-and-true military-intelligence partnership which leaves each the kingpin in its respective domain.

The Times keeps Israel out of the picture, as though the coalition America is forming to fight ISIS occurs in a self-contained vacuum. My question: Would there ever have been ISIS, under whatever name, as a movement of disaffected Islamic militancy, had not the US-Israel effort at the organization of the region to further their respective goals (successive circles of hegemony) been undertaken and implemented? Absent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even dating back to the Yishuv (pre-Independence), plus American penetration (given added import, beyond oil, from the Cold War onward), and indigenous government authority, especially that of Saudi Arabia and Iran, would have prevented the jihadist phenomenon as destabilizing regional order and their own regimes.

But no, the US and Israel could not keep hands off, the demiurge of domination for one, that along with support of a pivotal ally in achieving stabilization of a different kind, for the other, as a regional military presence the better to widen America’s sphere of influence in the contestation over global power. On the Middle East alone, repression is ugly, no matter whom the perpetrator, and no doubt a subsequent Arab Spring, had not the US-Israel paradigm of purposes and practices exacerbated the rise of popular consciousness, could have been controlled and moderated so as to be pressured back into existing channels. That appears to have happened anyway, as though a deeper current of understanding runs between all the parties underwriting the status quo. But WHO is principal repressor, seems the bone of contention.

By its intervention in the region against Iraq, its biased position with respect to an Israeli-Palestinian peace, its concerted animus, including regime change, with respect to Iran, its military and naval bases throughout the Arab countries, all these and more transferred the reins of repression to the US, using elites on the ground, through the sugar candy of weaponry and money, to keep order on American terms of reference: enlistment on its side in a potential or renewed Cold War, noninterference in Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. From the foregoing, it may appear outrageous and subversive to say, No wonder ISIS... but without implying endorsement of any kind, I cannot help but implicate America and Israel in its creation and actions.

For which now, the frantic coalition-building. Getting Sunnis on board is particularly opportunistic, as *The Times* readily admits: "The Obama administration needs to bring together a reliable international coalition as the backbone of its campaign to defeat the Islamic State, the Sunni extremist group that controls large parts of Iraq and Syria. So far, more than 40 countries have offered to help, and none are more important than the Sunni Muslim countries that are needed to give legitimacy to the American-led effort." This is a step up in Obama's thinking, legitimacy generally not of concern, period, in light of the drone assassinations, ubiquitous airstrikes real and contemplated, use of sanctions as a mode of political and economic warfare, Special Ops and CIA missions the scope and extent of which we shall probably never know, torture, rendition—why go on, the list is interminable. But here, by all means, stay within bounds of legitimacy in what is, after all, an illegitimate policy of crossing national borders—a compelling reason, besides diminishing Iran's power, for ousting Assad.

The task will not be easy: "But even if every would-be ally agreed to play a productive role [i.e., engage in airstrikes or send in ground forces], political grievances, sectarian tensions and mistrust make organizing the coalition a lot like solving a Rubik's Cube." I've never tried to, but neither has anyone done the more important equivalent: disengagement from the region, dismantlement of bases, let Israel sink or swim in its policies of occupation and prevention of a two-state solution, or simply, along with all of the foregoing, talk to the adversary, negotiate, putting away internal fears of weakness, the mindset of hubris, the fig leaf of Exceptionalism.

This is why WWII is not out of the question. The US's psychopathology of strength, dominance, hatred of difference, driving America into a cul-de-sac of ideological hardness and inflexibility, rather dead than red (even when red is not around), is like a locomotive rushing downhill, no brakes, almost, beneath the toughness, craving oblivion. I've written on Thanatos in previous *CounterPunch* articles; here it appears equally applicable because tapping the same muddled will to power. The *Times* editorial has cogent things to say about the present strategy, as in the editorial's subtitle, "Can Adversaries Become Allies to Fight ISIS?" We seem to play both sides against a middle of our own inspiration.

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, Iran and Syria, all in bold-face and caps, in all cases political cleavages we have helped to create, ensuring patch-work settlements through the common struggle against ISIS will be at best short-lived. The discussion on Iran provides a good example: "Both the United States and Iran, adversaries since the Islamic Revolution [actually US support of the Shah's coup d'état had never been forgotten], consider ISIS a threat. But Iranian leaders have ruled out direction cooperation in repelling the extremist group. [Not true: willingness to cooperate if the US reciprocated the cooperation.] Iran, one of the Assad regime's strongest allies, is worried that American airstrikes in Syria and expanded support for Syrian rebel forces could further damage

Mr. Assad's hold on power." It continued, "American leaders have been cool to cooperating with Iran because that would anger Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Muslim states. Negotiations on Iran's nuclear program, now at a critical point, are also affecting these calculations." Too many balls in the air, an atmosphere of obfuscation; meantime, the main thrust of military-political-economic policy toward global hegemony grinds on.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

The Times allows itself to fall into an abyss, and therefore an unresolvable political-diplomatic problem, without first peeling away CAUSAL layers for the present situation. Why the imbroglio? Why accept US actions, analysis, goals, solutions?

Is not the seeming Middle East chaos a function of interrelated developments: US intervention in the region (e.g., bases in Saudi Arabia precipitating the rise of bin Laden; Iraq intervention, a genesis for ISIS by way of Qaeda in Iraq), and Israel's divide-and-conquer strategy, aimed at both Iran and Assad?

Why bemoan the chaos, rather than demand US non-meddling where it should not be? America creates the original setting because of its larger geopolitical framework and strategy (containment of Russia and China) and then wants 40 nations to bail it out. We have been treated to a carnival of lies about "no troops on the ground." Months, perhaps weeks—and the lies will be exposed.

SEPTEMBER 23, 2014

### **The Nazification of America's Weapons Program**

Why Nazification? The retrofitting of America's nuclear arsenal, along with massive construction for the science, technology, and production of the next generation of this weaponry, in fact is to recapitulate Hitler's project of World Domination under liberal auspices, as the defense of freedom and democracy. Plain-spoken words, hardly extreme in the circumstances of today's revelations about how, under the mantle of arms control (more liberal sophistry, because from its inception the arms-control movement has been pushed by defense intellectuals, e.g., Rand Corporation and similar think tanks), the US has made a qualitative leap into the permanent business of death and destruction. Permanent, because the steps Obama is now taking binds subsequent administrations and indeed future generations to a course of action in which nuclear war, given the favorable political-cultural accommodation engineered to its acceptance, is made increasingly thinkable and, an American foreign policy centered on confrontation with Russia and China, therefore possible if not PROBABLE.

Radicals, time to wake up. For several decades we have understandably allowed a fragmentation of political consciousness to occur: there have been numerous issues and concerns to arouse anger and protest, from war, climate change, labor rights, ruling groups' intensification of power, degradation of the environment (simply to begin listing imperative and justifiable areas demanding social change is to recognize the grounds for societal reconstruction and transformation—and opposition to the existing order), but the NUCLEAR threat to human existence, all for the sake of perpetuating American power, capitalism, ideology, brings us up short and demands

acknowledgment. Our mistake has been, not that separable issues are not significant and worthy of attention, sacrifice, and social action, but that each and all must be also unified at least in thought and given a systemic foundation.

Only arrogance and sectarianism fuel the campaign focused on single-factored issues as of transcendent importance. They, in themselves, are all important, and respected as such, serve to generate a wider vision when once it's realized thwarted actions testify to a power structure inimical to other issues as well. That said, and sincerely meant, the present revelation about a regime dedicated to enhancement of nuclear weaponry as, budgetary figures alone, identifying it as, next to the actual conduct of war, the nation's priority number one. Social safety net? Don't make me laugh. Health, in its broadest scope? Ditto. Every aspect of social well-being, from preschool education to the protection and conservation of our natural surroundings, down the drain—all for the sake of astronomical sums bestowed on a nuclear stockpile and the means of its delivery to bludgeon the world's people into acceptance of US leadership.

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The New York Times article, "U.S. Ramping Up Major Renewal in Nuclear Arms," (Sept. 21), by William Broad and David Sanger, illuminates, though not intentionally, the enormity of the nuclear threat and the reasoning to advance the program. We know The Times engages in self-censorship, its top national-affairs reporters, as these two, accepting the conditions (possibly even agreeing with the administration in any case) for gaining access to POTUS and key officials. Yes, mouthpieces for the party line. Yet that is not reason for ignoring NYT or its reporters; it is not hard to navigate through the verbiage to reach the news. White House and Cabinet-level access (here, Departments of Defense and Energy) is a two-edged sword. As now, tremendous information is generated through enjoying favoritism, which can be put to critical use; the interpretation however is safe, authoritative, bordering on mindless propaganda. Still, I find the account a feast in that revealing the underbelly of the US military posture and Obama's own terrifying dimensions as a war-zealot.

Broad-Sanger begin with an idyllic picture, antiseptic, a valley of death with spotted cows, so to speak: "A sprawling new plant here [Kansas City, MO] in a former soybean field makes the mechanical guts of America's warheads." Breath-catching, an American Pastoral (is that Henry David Thoreau I see strolling through the woods?). Insanely macabre: "Bigger than the Pentagon, full of futuristic gear and thousands of workers, the plant, dedicated last month, modernizes the aging weapons that the United States can fire from missiles, bombers and submarines." Fife and drum, too thrilling for words: "It is part of a nationwide wave of atomic revitalization that includes a new generation of weapons carriers." The whole, a tribute to sanitized modernity, from aging weapons to atomic revitalization—worth everything at twice the price: "A recent federal study put the collective price tag, over the next three decades, at up to a trillion dollars."

And it probably would be twice the price, in light of cost overruns the reporters bring out. But it is "next three decades" which catches one's eye, because, like the drone assassination program, Obama sets out to cover vast ground, practically impossible to undo (here, factory starts, new weapons in the pipeline), that is intended to bind future administrations—all in keeping with the doctrine of permanent war. One reason the article is compelling is that nuclear rearmament (or if you prefer, atomic revitalization) is done outside the limelight of public scrutiny. Obama has been



accused of despising transparency—but on most counts that would be chicken feed compared with what is going on now, not the dollar-value of the expenditures but what they buy: mega-death at the ready.

Actually, his despisement runs deeper, to scrutiny of his actions, for one, and with it, a fear of discovery of his fraudulent character as the man of peace, disarmament (which initially caught the attention of the Nobel Committee), social justice and respect for international law (tell the Guantanamo captives, denied their habeas corpus rights, or the victims of his drone assassinations), and for another, his expansion of the war-provoking tendencies of American foreign policy (confrontation/sanctions with respect to Russia and the Pacific-first strategy, China)—all of which bear directly on Obama's nuclear-war propensities, as in the choice for weapons development configured to just such a course.

Laughably, Broad-Sanger would have him appear as a cross between Mohandas Gandhi and John Paul II, bitterly frustrated and disappointed when his plans for disarmament can't for some reason be realized. The step-by-step mischaracterization: "This expansion comes under a president who campaigned for 'a nuclear-free world' and made disarmament a main goal of defense policy." Then the arms-control phony-baloney, in which more becomes less through confidence-building: "The original idea was that modest rebuilding of the nation's crumbling nuclear complex would speed arms refurbishment, raising confidence in the arsenal's reliability and paving the way for new treaties that would significantly cut the number of war heads." (Yet, even when the last is supposedly carried out—no sign of which here—it is understood that the remaining stock is to be more deadly: the blessings of nuclear modernization.)

The admission, still, the other guy, not Obama: "Instead, because of political deals [Congressmen want facilities and jobs in their districts] and geopolitical crises, the Obama administration is engaging in extensive atomic rebuilding while getting only modest arms reductions in return." Poor Obama, left a tragic figure as the world sweeps on: "Supporters of arms control, as well as some of President Obama's closest advisers, say their hopes for the president's vision have turned to baffled disappointment as the modernization of nuclear capabilities has become an end unto itself." To conclude the thought, a prime Democratic Cold-Warrior is brought in to confirm Obama's immaculate (peace) conception: "'A lot of it is hard to explain,' said Sam Nunn, the former senator whose writings on nuclear disarmament deeply influenced Mr. Obama. 'The president's vision was a significant change in direction. But the process has preserved the status quo.'" Obama, in Churchillian splendor, resists the winds of change, to no avail.

Enough, or almost so. The Wounded Tiger, described here with the reporters' own Cold War take, leads to an unblemished Prince of Peace: "With Russia on the warpath, China pressing its own territorial claims and Pakistan expanding its arsenal, the overall chances for Mr. Obama's legacy of disarmament look increasingly dim, analysts say." Congress wants the US to look "tough in Washington's escalating confrontation with Moscow," said without skipping a beat, and presumably an attitude not shared by Obama. Too, it's all Putin's fault. Gary Samore, former Obama nuclear adviser and now at Harvard: "'The most fundamental game changer is Putin's invasion of Ukraine. That has made any measure to reduce the stockpile unilaterally politically impossible.'" Obama never wanted reduction, except conceivably linked (as in Start II) with greater lethality, and no-one is asking for unilateral reduction, another fig leaf.

Start II was a numbers game, modest reductions, more destructive power through the proposed back alley making all such treaties obsolete: that of nuclear modernization. This would be his direction, but Republican opposition to the Treaty enabled Obama to save face (seemingly a step toward peace) by complying with the Republicans' calls for "an aggressive rehabilitation of American nuclear forces and manufacturing sites" as though modernization were harmless cosmetics (to his peace groupies) while being in earnest—refurbishment, \$355B over ten years (CBO estimate) as "just the start." Broad-Sanger: "The price tag will soar after 10 years as missiles, bombers and submarines made in the last century reach the end of their useful lives and replacements are built." Ashton Carter, a former deputy secretary of defense: "That's where all the big money is. By comparison, everything that we're doing now is cheap."

Our Peace POTUS is engrossed in the itemized allotments, missiles, bombers, submarines, breakfast food for the Cold warrior. Obama on a roll: "The money is flowing into a sprawling complex for making warheads that includes eight major plants and laboratories employing more than 40,000 people." The term "refurbishment" sounds so nice and sweet—to brighten or freshen up, renovate (Webster's)—when in reality there is much NEW production, not only plants but warheads themselves, and, since much of this comes under the Dept. of Energy, it is wonderful to see factories dedicated to death are energy efficient (like patching the roofs of crematoria, so gases do not leak out).

Thus, an old bomb plant in Kansas City, damaged by floods and having "tacky furniture," voila, under the New Obama Dispensation, a sterilized death machine: "Its replacement, eight miles south, sits on higher ground. Its five buildings hold 2,700 employees—just like the old plant—but officials say it uses half the energy [hooray!], saving about \$150 million annually. Everything is bright and modern, from the sleek lobby and cafeteria to the fitness center. Clean rooms for delicate manufacturing have tighter dust standards than hospital operating rooms." Not a glimmer of irony, bought by the administration (in spirit) hook, line, and sinker. Idyllic, even to the point of giving it a name so that it is everything but what it is—the study perchance of Liberal Arts, rather than the manufacture of death: "It is called the National Security Campus rather than a factory for weapons that can pound cities into radioactive dust."

Maybe there is still hope for the reporters. Oops, premature, for the glitter of mega-death cannot be gainsaid. After all, this is Obama's own high-tech world, where the "pilot" for a drone assassination sits comfortably in Las Vegas thousands of miles away from the individual or group he obliterates. Kansas City, one has the same eerie feeling about human depravity in assembling the wherewithal for doing in a fellow human being: "Their main job now is extending the life of a nearly 40-year-old submarine warhead called the W-76. Drawing on thousands of parts, they seek to make it last 60 years—three times as long as originally planned. The warhead's new guts, a colorful assortment of electronic and mechanical parts, lay alongside a SHINY NOSE CONE on a metal table outside an assembly hall." (caps., mine, the image too beautiful/poetic to pass up)

Kansas City, they report, "is the crown jewel of the modernization effort," but "other projects are reminders of how many billions have yet to be spent, and how even facilities completed successfully can go awry." Where are the fiscal conservatives? And where, the liberals, hungering for bigger and better (bombs)—if it means new facilities, new construction, new jobs? The record is a litany of WASTE, itself nothing compared to the purpose of the activity (which suggests complicity of the fiscal conservatives and liberals alike: war, intervention, civilian death, anything

for patriotism... and the larder). E.g., Los Alamos National Laboratory: “plans for a new complex to shape plutonium fuel emerged a decade ago with a \$660 million price tag. But antinuclear groups kept publicizing embarrassing details, like the discovery of a geologic fault under the site. The estimated cost soared to \$5.8 billion, and in 2012, the Obama administration suspended the project.”

Or this, the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge: \$550M for a “fortress... to safeguard the nation’s main supply of highly enriched uranium,” to which, “in 2012, an 82-year-old Roman Catholic nun, Megan Rice, and two accomplices cut through fences, splashed blood on the stronghold and sprayed its walls with peace slogans.” Her sentence, almost three years in prison. Now prepared for “an even bigger upgrade—replacing buildings that process uranium—the [site’s] price tag soared from \$6.5 billion to \$19 billion,” the administration, amidst the lab’s hopes for going ahead, “scuttled the current plan.”

More broadly, “across the nation, 21 major upgrades have been approved and 36 more proposed,” this squarely under Obama and not to be chalked up to his predecessors. The GAO warned, “the managers of the atomic complex had repeatedly omitted and underestimated billions of dollars in costs, leaving the plan with ‘less funding than will be needed.’” Not surprisingly, the reporters state, “the Obama administration says it sees no contradiction between rebuilding the nation’s atomic complex and the president’s vow to make the world less dependent on nuclear arms.” They cite a deputy energy secretary about how “the improvements... have reassured allies. ‘It’s important to our extended deterrent,’” by which he meant “the American nuclear umbrella over nations in Asia and the Middle East, which has instilled a sense of military security and kept many from building their own arsenals.”

Perhaps that is what Obama means by making the world less dependent on nuclear arms; let the US nuclear umbrella cover the world, and everyone will be safe and secure. In any case, his wish-list is hard to square with professions of peace or a reduction of nuclear weapons: “The administration has told the Pentagon to plan for 12 new missile submarines, up to 100 new bombers and 400 land-based missiles, either new or refurbished.” Manufacturing costs are estimated to “peak between 2024 and 2029,” what I meant by his attempt to bind future administrations to his war-framework and policies. Estimated cost by the Monterey Institute of “the nuclear enterprise over the next three decades,” \$900B to \$1.1Trillion.

As one official said, “this [setting federal spending for 2016] is Obama’s legacy budget,” and we can all rest comfortably under the nuclear umbrella, except when it rains (renewed and further confrontation with Russia and China).

My New York Times Comment on the Broad-Sanger article, Sept. 22, follows (in what I take to be an act of censorship, it was never published—I wrote in protest to the Public Editor but obviously expect no explanation):

Back to the ‘Fifties: arms-control, then and now, was never a step toward reduction, let alone disarmament, but the sophisticated obfuscation signifying nuclear modernization via greater lethality and efficiency of production. By this program, Obama has indeed defined his legacy: Strangelove-Kissinger-Herman Kahn moral cipher, cementing for the foreseeable future a world having the means at hand for cosmic annihilation. The utter darkness of the vision, its gnawing dehumanization by placing the world at risk, is absolutely fitting for where we are at this time.

To wit, poised for confrontation with Russia and China as the cornerstone of American foreign policy. Drone assassination, Special Ops-CIA paramilitary operations, torture, mass surveillance at home to ensure such projects as the embarkation on a vastly enlarged nuclear war-machine, these are mere harbingers of the Obama Bloodlust for keeping America always striving for unilateral global dominance.

Despite the article's constant hints of Obama the Nobel prize champion of peace, who now reluctantly finds himself at odds with his '08 campaign promises, the portrayal is utter falseness. Today's Obama is '08 Obama carefully groomed to appear differently. Hungering for acceptance, not only on Wall Street but also among the military-intelligence communities, he is far more dangerous (with the slick patina of liberalism) than Bush 2 ever was.

The trillion-dollar death trip. All aboard. Poverty at home be damned.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2014

### **Mission Creep Turns Global**

Hail the Conquering Hero. Obama at the UN in a superbly orchestrated scenario calculated to strike terror into one and all: massive airstrikes, as so many trumpets announcing his arrival, and before, a panoramic view of the new nuclear-bomb facilities and thirty-year plan of nuclear modernization (factories for warheads, delivery systems modernized and/or on the drawing boards), Valhalla peeping from the distance in the Potomac mists.

America has become unrecognizable, World Conquest in the air we breathe, a POTUS Caligula-like who feigns the persona of Mother Theresa, utterly corrupt in his professions of peace as he rolls out what has become shock-and-awe demonstrations to which the world, under duress, is becoming accustomed. Nothing out of bounds: Tomahawk missiles from offshore, waves of airstrikes, business as usual. Not a drop of hesitation, as lawyers dust off 9/11-era authorization for what is proving a never-ending onslaught, today, terrorists, tomorrow, Russia, the next day, China, then perhaps day after, dissidents, such that remain, in America itself, a rapacious, devouring, demiurge of insatiable conquest-at-any-cost.

Would ISIS even exist, had not the US sought to control the Middle East ever since the deposition of Mossadegh in Iran, the military build-up and defense of Israel, the American military bases throughout the region, the invasion of Iraq (fill in the in-between blanks, and carry forward to today)? America has not learned that repression breeds resistance, that counterrevolution establishes interconnections among the oppressed, that occupations and spheres-of-influence cannot (thank goodness) be made permanent. In every sense of the word, the US has CREATED what it now calls terrorism, the fruit of unwanted intervention, power politics, installing regimes which do our bidding.

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New York Times reporter Peter Baker (authoritative White House mouthpiece) presents valuable data in his article, "In Airstrikes, U.S. Targets Militant Cell Said to Plot an Attack Against the West," (Sept. 23), in which it is evident the bowling pins (terrorist groups) are to be knocked down

in a row, one popping up no sooner than the other has been attacked. Here ISIS, then Khorasan, the new star in the firmament. “American forces took advantage of the airstrikes against the Islamic State extremist group in Syria,” he writes, “to try to simultaneously wipe out the leadership of an unrelated cell of veterans of Al Qaeda that the White House said Tuesday [Sept. 23] was plotting an ‘imminent’ attack against the United States or Europe.” The “imminent” attack, he states later in the article, remains unproven (although because officially pronounced, he therefore finds credible).

American military resourcefulness: “The [senior] officials said they had been contemplating military action against Khorasan in recent months, but President Obama’s decision to hit the Islamic State’s forces inside Syria provided a chance to neutralize the other perceived threat.” There are perceived threats under every bed in Washington officialdom. But then NYT’s slight demur: “Several officials said Khorasan had an advanced plan for an attack involving a bomb that could pass undetected through airport security systems, perhaps by lacing nonmetallic objects like toothpaste tubes and clothes with explosive material, **ALTHOUGH** [my caps.] officials offered no details in public and did not provide specifics on how soon an attack might be carried out.” Nevertheless, bomb the hell out of them.

Orchestrated Grand Entrance: “The air campaign against Khorasan and the Islamic State got underway even as Mr. Obama flew to New York to meet with world leaders gathering at the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly.” And why not, given the brazen violation of international law? Baker continues: “Mr. Obama did not seek United Nations permission for the military campaign, but he presented the strikes as the collaboration of a multinational coalition that included five Arab nations: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain.” Truly a multinational coalition (ha), although, again, all news reports point to overwhelming US participation—the latest spin on the “friends and allies” theme used to legitimate American wars and interventions hiding behind others’ skirts. And then the Obama flourish on arriving in New York, stated “during a hastily arranged photo opportunity” with Arab dignitaries: “‘Because of the almost unprecedented effort of this coalition, I think we now have an opportunity to send a very clear message that the world is united.’”

From Saudi Arabia to Bahrain, speaking for the whole world, a united world—what presumptuousness. Even Baker has to admit, “Still the bulk of the military efforts were conducted by American forces, and reaction in the Middle East was mixed.” No matter, only the usual suspects (enemies): “President Hassan Rouhani of Iran, which is allied with the government of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, said the airstrikes were illegal because they were not conducted with the approval of Syria’s government, a point later echoed by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, another ally of Syria’s.” This last, however, is significant, so much involving the Middle East having to do with bloodying Putin’s nose and seeking confrontation with Russia, as part of the next stage in claiming US global hegemony.

The UN appearance of Obama’s is largely a US advertisement of impunity in its actions, ISIS the ideal or archetypal villain to which all might oppose, as America qua leader of counterterrorism thus burnishes democratic credentials in positioning its military forces for the wider campaign of intimidation or, if that doesn’t work, to degrade and destroy (Obama’s new equivalent of “Don’t Tread On Me”) the Enemy the US has clearly identified. The very coming together of the UN meeting, the bombing of Syria, and the revelation of extensive and expanding nuclear preparations (Broad-Sanger article in *The Times* which I analyzed recently in *CounterPunch*), all suggest an

acceleration of provocative military moves aimed at the longer-term realization of America's total military-political-economic-ideological dominance in the world.

Just before coming to New York, the helicopter as backdrop, Obama announced on the White House lawn: "Once again, it must be clear to anyone who would plot against America [Putin and Li fit the description, while unmentioned in the script] and try to do Americans harm that we will not tolerate safe havens for terrorists who threaten our people." The problem is, in official American eyes, everyone who stands in the way of US hegemony is a terrorist, unless willing to submit. As for Khorasan, with which we began, "one senior counterterrorism official... said the group might not have chosen the target, method or even timing for a strike. An intelligence official said separately that the group was 'reaching a stage where they might be able to do something.'" Kudos for Baker here, in ferreting out negative opinion.

The point, manufacture scares, antecedently, construct the context which makes anti-American actions plausible, thereby enjoying both the privileges of intervention/domination and legitimating formula that justifies further such actions, perpetual war for perpetual suppression for perpetual supremacy, a monstrous cat chasing its tail never satisfied, never appeased, an insatiable appetite for... what? If I said, capitalism, that would be simplistic, for it's a corroded form of capitalism, beyond political economy, even perhaps imperialism, more like the death throes of a decaying civilization bent on bringing the rest of the world with it.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker article, Sept. 24, follows:

Obama is a varsity hurdler, leaping over all barriers: no congressional authorization for war-engagement (violation of US Constitution), no permission from legitimate Syrian government (violation of international law), and nearing the finish line, what next? Provocative moves on Russia and China—already in evidence?

The Obama administration, with a cast like Kerry, Rice, Power, Rhodes, supported by Brennan at CIA and the crew at NSA—not a shred of pretense left that it and the Democratic party are any less belligerent, warmongering, absolutely callous to the civilian deaths they are inflicting, than the Republicans.

A bipartisan death machine now in high gear. These airstrikes so obviously orchestrated in timing to coincide with Obama's appearance at the UN. He seems to need a tonic—large-scale force—to enable him to appear on the world stage. And so, America is fully living up to its doctrine of Permanent War—keep the juices flowing (like in Strangelove) to prove to ourselves and to the world our power, strength, moral virtue.

How many more do we have to kill to demonstrate our Exceptionalism and Virtue? We don't realize that with every Nazi-like act of barbarism, we create still more terrorists, still more enemies—until the Middle East will become a bloodbath-through-air power. If Khorasan is indeed real, and not another deliberate propaganda scare, how many more will be borne after that one is destroyed, in response to US intervention and atrocities?

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Obama's address to the UN General Assembly Wednesday [Sept. 24] was a megalomaniac's delight, a go-for-broke historical moment in which he advanced US claims to global leadership on

three fronts: lead a world coalition against Islamic terrorism, ditto against the Ebola virus, and a narrower coalition against Russia, purposely conflated as America's mission to move the international community out of darkness into the refulgent splendor of US-defined light. The Ebola mission a late-comer (just as now also, climate change) is to add respectability to the push for a return to the militarily-underwritten hegemonic expansion reclaiming unilateral dominance in a fragmenting world order: a decentralization of world power as Russia and China dispute US unilateralism's proclivities to war, intervention, and the right of financial-commercial penetration.

This is a new ball game, and Obama thinks he's Babe Ruth—long since dead. Indeed, Ruth would be the least of it, for the Bambino didn't have to bully, exaggerate, dissimulate, or, for that matter, assassinate, to prove himself. Obama needs a war machine to prove his legitimacy. He needs massive surveillance and massive airstrikes, constant intervention and constant engenderment of fear, fist pumps with the military and intelligence communities and fist pumps with the bankers of Wall Street, if he is to walk tall, confident in his world class pretensions as here before the General Assembly.

Khorasan is the latest Scare to force acquiescence and final submission of the American people so that they will accept a state of permanent war, a class structure of widening disparities—already great—of wealth, an ideology anti-humane in its denial of PUBLIC dedication to the social welfare (from aggressive action on the climate-and-environmental fronts to heightened performance on health care and a vitalized social safety net). One would think, from Obama's hype about Khorasan, coming as part of a blitzkrieg propaganda offensive this week alone, the UN speech one of several activities and signs having a snow-ball effect, that a massed (and masked) terrorist organization was infiltrating the Homeland, when, as we learn from Mark Mazzetti's NYT article, "A Terror Cell That Avoided the Spotlight," that "its size seemed to fluctuate, but that it consisted of approximately TWO DOZEN OPERATIVES [my caps.], most of whom came to Syria from Pakistan and Afghanistan beginning in 2012."

Mazzetti implies the not-coincidental timing of its revelation: "The group's evolution from obscurity to infamy has been sudden: The first time President Obama publicly mentioned the group was on Tuesday [Sept. 23, one day before the UN speech], when he announced he had ordered an airstrike against it to disrupt what American officials said was a terror plot aimed at the West." As for the terror plot, passed off as about to happen (hence, his ordering an airstrike), his own national-security people undercut him (an unusual occurrence): They've "given differing accounts about just how close the group was to mounting an attack, and about what chance any plot had of success. One senior American official on Wednesday [Sept. 24] described the Khorasan plotting as 'aspirational' and said that there did not yet seem to be a concrete plan in the works."

Approximately two dozen operatives, yet a heavy bombing campaign, the placing of the Homeland on high alert, even the shifting of attention from ISIS to this new sinister menace facing America. Fakery, opportunism, deceit? Am I surprised? One final quote from Mazzetti: While several Obama aides said "the airstrikes against the Khorasan operatives were launched to thwart an 'imminent' terrorist attack," other "American officials said that the plot [concealed explosives to blow up planes] was far from mature, and that there was no indication that Khorasan had settled on a time or location for the attack—or even on the exact method of carrying out the plot." But Obama was set to go, in a speech before the General Assembly that I will examine momentarily.

The transcript is from the Washington Post (Sept. 25); The Times had only Mark Landler's account, with a few highlights from the speech. But even his coverage had value in showing how Obama's themes were interrelated and ambitiously occupying advanced ground in claiming world leadership. His article, "In U.N. Speech, Obama Vows to Fight ISIS 'Network of Death,'" (Sept. 24), says as much right off the bat: "President Obama on Wednesday charted a muscular new course for the United States in a turbulent world telling the United Nations General Assembly in a bluntly worded speech that the American military would work with allies to dismantle the Islamic State's 'network of death' and warning Russia that it would pay for its bullying of Ukraine." One has the feeling, as now, that Obama projects on to the Enemy traits which best describe America, particularly the policy and well-crafted art of bullying. Also, Landler is being overly kind, for in addition to "dismantle," one must add degrade and destroy.

As per the Obama myth, assigned to him, but which, when it suited his convenience, he accepted and played along with—the "cool" POTUS, cerebral, contemplative, always reluctant to commit himself until all the facts are in—Landler dutifully transmits: "Two days after ordering airstrikes on dozens of militant targets in Syria, Mr. Obama issued a fervent call to arms against the Islamic State—the once-reluctant warrior now apparently resolved to waging a twilight struggle against Islamic extremism for the remainder of his presidency." Obama, now Man of Action—avenue of new-found popularity, just as Nobelist (whilst still harboring aggressive intent, made clear by, among other things, continuities in policy with Bush) was the avenue to '08 election and throwing a liberal patina around interventionist-corporatist-militarist record. "Those who have joined ISIL," he proclaimed, "should leave the battlefield while they can. For we will not succumb to threats, and we will demonstrate that the future belongs to those who build, not those who destroy." Drone strikes, saturation bombing, paramilitary operations for regime change, I guess, build, and not destroy.

Another brief glimpse, from a not by any means hostile source: "[ISIS] was only the most urgent of an onslaught of global challenges that have given the United States no choice but to take the lead: from resisting Russia's aggression against Ukraine to coordinating a response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.... Mr. Obama on Wednesday spoke more like a wartime leader.... In addressing the Ukraine crisis, Mr. Obama used his strongest language yet, portraying Russia's incursions as an affront to the principles of the United Nations and promising to levy a cost on President Vladimir V. Putin." One would think Putin was a member of ISIS in good standing, or roaming West Africa spreading the Ebola virus.

Let's look briefly at the speech. It is so porous with phony idealism, a Candyland of Universal Human Rights, of noble thoughts uniting the world religions, of selfless America battling disease and global warming, that touching down on specific policy is difficult. The two main areas are counterterrorism and Russia. Here my interest is the latter, Obama's discussion having the effect of dashing cold water on the piling of platitudes one on top of the other, as to negotiation, international harmony, interconnectivity, and, on nuclear disarmament, an outright obfuscation of America's rapid advancement in the research and development of more lethal weaponry and the means of their delivery.

On Russia, then, first the grandiloquent introduction to the attack: "Fellow delegates, we come together as United Nations with a choice to make. We can renew the international system that has enabled so much progress, or allow ourselves to be pulled back by an undertow of instability.... For



America, the choice is clear. We choose hope over fear. We see the future not as something out of control, but as something we can shape for the better through concerted and collective effort. We reject fatalism or cynicism when it comes to human affairs; we choose to work for the world as it should be, as our children deserve it to be.” No comment on my part.

Obama states: “Russia’s actions in Ukraine challenge this post-war order [idyllically pictured in the speech, as though there had not been a Cold War]. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protest and calls for reform, their corrupt President fled.... This is a vision of the world in which might makes right—a world in which one nation’s borders can be redrawn by another, and civilized people are not allowed to recover the remains of their loved ones [the downed airliner, cause prejudged by the US] because of the truth that might be revealed. America stands for something different. We believe right makes might—that bigger nations should not be allowed to bully smaller ones; that people should be allowed to choose their own future.”

Peace, friendship, negotiation—the only solution, therefore: “America and our allies will support the people of Ukraine as they develop their democracy and economy. We will reinforce our NATO allies, and uphold our commitment to collective defense. We will impose a cost on Russia for aggression, and counter falsehoods with the truth. We call upon others to join us on the right side of history....” This is practically a declaration of war; even the imagery gets mixed with the position toward ISIS.

SEPTEMBER 29, 2014

### **The Power Politics of Capitalist Expansion**

Anything goes, for the demonization of Putin, even as now when the charge, surrounding himself with Oligarchs, is really looking in the mirror at America’s own image. I do not have to or want to apologize for insider-plutocratic dealings in shaping the post-Soviet Russian economy. Frankly the Jeffrey Sachs dystopian vision of tearing socialism to shreds is more than unfortunate; its operational acceptance in Russia is a betrayal of a Socialist World that, after Stalin’s death, could have advanced the democratization of vast stretches of the international political economy and put a large bite on America’s economic power and performance. Instead, the reverse seems to be happening. Now Russia, then in short order, China, in the cross-hairs for weakening and ultimate political dismemberment and/or economic retrogradation because America’s militarization of monopoly capital will brook no opposition in this recently defined structure of intracapitalist rivalries.

Putin and Li have broken the historical connection to Marx. For that, I, for one, wish otherwise in that we see in Russia and China a bastardized version of state capitalism, rather than a clean break into democratic socialism. The creation of billionaires, summer residences on the Cote d’Azur, town houses in Belgravia, drag these countries down to the American level of consumerism and structural inequality.

Yet, my emphasis here on Russia, there is a difference: Putin is not out to conquer the world; a stable Russia in an equally stable international order appears to be enough, and to keep hegemonic claims within strict bounds. None of Obama’s grandiose rhetoric about saving the world for freedom and democracy, none of his life-strangling military budget which, almost by design, has

shrunk the social safety net, and none of the drastic expansion in the realm of nuclear modernization to lethally stockpile weapons and perfect the means of delivery. Putin is a far more circumspect world leader than Obama and his predecessors. The KGB label has great propaganda value in the campaign of vilification against him, but where are his personally authorized drone assassinations, his airstrikes, his world-encircling military bases? And is KGB any more repressive and murderous than CIA or Special Ops forces promoting regime change, or more intrusive on privacy than NSA massive surveillance activities?

Still, Oligarchs, whatever their national origin, are deplorable, so here is a brief account of the New York Times article by Steven Lee Myers, Jo Becker, and Jim Yardley, entitled, “Private Bank Fuels Fortunes of Putin’s Inner Circle,” (Sept. 28), which sheds light on Putin’s rise to power and—although the US skips lightly over the subject, if ever referring to it at all—the destructive social costs of PRIVATIZATION of government resources. When Russia systemically veers toward America, it damages its humanistic potential and reality. Paradoxically, the Old Cold War reflected ideological differences, the New Cold War the partial erasing of those differences, though somehow raising the stakes because within capitalism lies a more ferocious beast last seen prior to 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution, that of internecine competition for world supremacy. Only now, Russia doesn’t appear willing to play the game, under Putin, building, to paraphrase and invert Stalin, “capitalism in one country.” For Obama, why stop there?

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This is all about Bank Rossiya. Myers et. al. write, “In late March, the United States had made Bank Rossiya a primary target of sanctions, effectively ostracizing it from the global financial system. Now the Kremlin was pushing back, steering lucrative accounts its way to reduce the pain.” (I flinch when I see “Kremlin” referred to in The Times, a way of conjuring Uncle Joe back in command.) Would Putin have continued to show favoritism to the bank—for he did earlier to some extent—if the US hadn’t made it central to the sanctions, and stigmatized it specifically by making it personal? No-one should doubt his nationalism, in this case transcending issues of cronyism because Bank Rossiya, under attack, had in his mind become a stand-in for Russia itself. In effect, by way of comparison, Obama is more capitalist than nationalist; when he favors JPMorganChase, Boeing, etc., he doesn’t confuse—but he may purposely conflate—the identity of the banking or business firm with the nation, and rather, treats them well for their own sake. The nation, for him, is secondary to the interests of its ruling groups (for which the military-intelligence communities are found to be indispensable).

When the obscure Market Council shifted the business of the wholesale electricity market to Bank Rossiya, “a tidy coup set to yield an estimated \$100 million or more in annual commissions,” there were other “state corporations, local governments and even the Black Sea Fleet... suddenly shifting their accounts to the bank, too,” creating “an enormous windfall.” Yet, the reporters fail to mention, some of this activity occurred in April, after the sanctions were declared, a thumbing-the-nose at the sanctions regime and not merely rewarding friends. Nevertheless, Bank Rossiya—discounting the inflammatory language of the reporters—helped turn Putin “loyalists into billionaires whose influence over strategic sectors of the economy has in turn helped him maintain his iron-fisted grip on power.” This should not be blinked. As noted, friendship altered the distribution of wealth, even if he did not personally benefit.

As a paradigm of capitalist development, however, the transformation from bureaucratic socialism to state capitalism is not hard to imagine, whether or not his presumed inner circle performed the vanguard role. (Probably the same general set of historical dynamics applies to China as well, from Mao to Li, although cronyism appears to be more clearly identified in China than in Russia.) Had Russia been able to experience a peaceful transformation following the break-up of the Soviet Union, in a world where capitalism had not been the vehicle for international dominance, perhaps, only just perhaps, the result could have been a more genuine mixed economy, shorn of billionaires and state favoritism.

This did not happen. The reporters are essentially correct when they write: “Mr. Putin came to power vowing to eliminate ‘as a class’ the oligarchs who had amassed fortunes—and, to the new president’s mind, a dangerous quotient of political sway—under his predecessor, Boris N. Yeltsin, in the post-Communist chaos of the 1990s. Instead, a new class of tycoons have emerged, men of humble Soviet origins who owe their vast wealth to Mr. Putin, and offer unquestioning political fealty to him in return.”

Regrettably, banks will be banks. Bank Rossiya (like Willie Sutton, I rob banks because that’s where the money’s at) has gathered up Russia’s entrepreneurial talent, like Yuri Kovalchuk, its chairman and largest shareholder, “a physicist by training, sometimes called the Rupert Murdoch of Russia for his role as architect of the bank’s media interests.” Also, it resorts to “shadowy corporate shell structures,” like offshore companies in the British Virgin Islands. As for stockholders, I was at least gratified to see Sergei Roldugin, a cellist who has used his investment in the bank to convert a 19th century Saint Petersburg palace into “the House of Music, a training academy for classical musicians.” (I toss that example in gratis) No question the cronyism—the article cites many examples, along with the reported wealth of leading oligarchs associated with the bank. “Business connections,” the reporters write, “became deeply personal connections,” including Putin’s “join[ing] seven businessmen, most of them Bank Rossiya shareholders, in forming [in 1996, for they all go back quite far] a cooperative of summer homes, or dachas, called Ozero, or ‘lake,’ in the northeast of Saint Petersburg.”

But is this, as critics claim, “legalized kleptocracy”? To put a fine point on the matter, the personal factor appears separate from State considerations in Putin’s mind. One Oligarch, Gennady Timchenko, an oil trader and Bank Rossiya investor, (himself under sanctions), explained: “he would never presume to question the Russian president’s policies in Ukraine, whatever the cost to companies like his. ‘That would be impossible,’ he said, going on to refer to Mr. Putin formally by his first name and patronymic. ‘Vladimir Vladimirovich acts in the interests of Russia in any situation, period. No compromises. It would not even enter our minds to discuss that.’” That is extremely important. State capitalism is not necessarily the interpenetration of business and government, that which I’ve described in articles in CounterPunch examining US structural dynamics leading to the fascist phase of advanced capitalism.

If Vladimir Vladimirovich is not exactly a throwback to Tolstoy, still we see, in Putin, capitalism in Russia is more Russian than nakedly capitalist. America has been and remains puristically capitalist, summoning the requisite domestic (massive surveillance, hostile climate toward labor, vast wealth-disparity) and foreign (war, intervention, pursuit of global hegemony) policies for its attempted sustainment. This is a big difference between the two, the US finding it intolerable that Russia, perhaps even more than in its Soviet form, places other factors above and beyond

capitalism, as practiced in the US, as an integrally aggressive-expansive system, no holds barred in its global conduct. Socialism, easy to oppose and condemn; this nationalist/capitalist political formation, less so, because the alternative formation within capitalism speaks to other potentialities, including better care for its own citizens.

My New York Times Comment to the Myers-Becker-Yardley article, same date, follows:

Excellent documentation. Yet what does a comparative analysis reveal? That crony capitalism is alive and well in both Russia and the West, and that the latter's criticisms seem odd because the same ideological framework holds true for America and Russia. We feign the same spirit of anticommunism characteristic of the First Cold War (undeniably, we are now into a Second), when in reality the US is jealous of Russia's capitalistic success.

Attacks on Putin are sour grapes. What is the bailout of American banks, but crony capitalism? What the cozy relationship between the Pentagon and the major defense companies, but crony capitalism? It does not require a leader, here, Putin, to define the condition. Crony capitalism can be, and is, in America, SYSTEMIC, with Obama hardly passive in advancing the wide cleavage in US wealth distribution.

No one claims Putin enriches himself through crony capitalism, and in fact, I accept his argument that, not the Russian companies, but geopolitical and geostrategic concerns motivate his policies. Can Obama and the US say the same, when he serves as a shill for US business abroad, esp. in the Far East? The sanctions-business is amusing: a cover for the more ambitious plan to contain, isolate, and weaken Russia—next, ditto, China—as America desperately strives to return to unilateral preeminence in the global structure. The world is de-centered with Russia and China's rise; America must learn to share power, or else collapse.

OCTOBER 1, 2014

### **Israel's Fascistization of Judaism**

Yom Kippur, only days away, a time of repentance, lately, the utter savagery in attacking Gaza and its people, the burning alive of a Palestinian youngster, the rubble, destitution, bombing of UN schools serving as civilian shelters, the water treatment plants, electricity grids (cutting off power to hospitals), all in all, a full-scale display of shock and awe designed and intended to humble, humiliate, degrade, and depersonalize THE OTHER as so much tripe standing in the way of the Manifest Destiny of Fortress Israel in its might and superior moral worth...Yom Kippur, only days away, and not a ripple of soul-searching, a crease of the brow, even an afterthought about the infliction of death and the evil it represents. A good start to the Jewish New Year, one that makes a mockery of the piety of observance, the supposed agony and anguish over thoughts and deeds that violate the teachings of Torah and its declarations for social justice, again, all in all, the blasphemous worship of God, itself an oxymoron only possible when truth is suppressed and POWER transforms humans into little gods themselves, free to play with the lives and fortunes of all deemed THE OTHER as they see fit. Shana Tova, Israel, for wiping away the pride Judaism had always felt about welcoming the stranger, siding with the underdog, dedicating life to the

humanistic emancipation of ALL PEOPLES. For that, I cannot forgive you. Judaism is too precious to be corrupted by arrogance, militarism, wanton murder!

Just after Rosh Hashanah the New York Times published an op-ed article surprisingly critical of Israel, Mairav Zonszein's "How Israel Silences Dissent, (Sept. 26), which describes a national siege-mentality in which government from on high countenances violence against antiwar protesters through its own cues and its indifference to hooliganism as in attacks against dissidents. (As I read one account for which Zonszein provides the link, I was reminded of my own experience in Detroit at an antiwar rally in 1967, the same right-wing attack, Breakthrough interchangeable with the Israeli The Lions, ours CIA-backed, who knows about theirs?—the police nowhere in sight, or rather standing idly by, as though to incite or encourage the harassment.) Repression wears a familiar face wherever it occurs.

Zonszein writes: "the injuries suffered in Tel Aviv that night [July 12] stemmed not from rocket fire but from a premeditated assault by a group of extremist Israeli Jews. Chanting 'Death to Arabs' and 'Death to leftists,' they attacked protesters with clubs. Although several demonstrators were beaten and required medical attention, the police made no arrests." Indeed, from the original account, the police fled the scene for shelters when the sirens went off. When they returned, still no protection as the scene grew more violent, these avowedly fascist thugs chasing demonstrators into cafes and wrecking the premises. The record continues: "The same thing happened at another antiwar protest in Haifa a week later; this time, the victims included the city's deputy mayor, Suhail Assad, and his son. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made no statement condemning the violence, even though he had previously stated his primary concern was the safety of Israeli citizens."

But talk is cheap, and, interestingly, in the first example, we see "Death to Arabs" and "Death to leftists" paired as though one, clearly indicative of the right-wing surge (I think that's fair to say) in Israeli politics. The writer continues: "The vilification of the few Israelis who don't subscribe to right-wing doctrine is not new. [This from an Israeli-American writer; I don't feel alone, then, in saying there is overwhelming popular support in Israel for its war policies and militaristic mindset.] Similar acts of incitement occurred before the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. But now they have MULTIPLIED, ESCALATED AND SPREAD." (my caps.) E.g., "On July 10, the veteran Israeli actress Gila Almagor did not show up to perform at Tel Aviv's Habima Theater; she had received threats that she would be murdered on stage." Her crime? "In an interview in the Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot a few days earlier, she had expressed feeling ashamed after a 16-year old Palestinian, Muhammed Abu Khdeir, was kidnapped and burned alive by Jewish extremists."

Celebrities and journalists are attacked with impunity: Orna Banai, a popular comedian, was fired as a "spokeswoman for an Israeli cruise ship operator" when she expressed sadness that in Gaza "Palestinian women and children were being killed"; also, "Haaretz hired bodyguards for its columnist Gideon Levy after he wrote an article criticizing Israeli Air Force pilots." Zonszein points to the basic ethnocentrism characterizing Israeli thought: "The aggressive silencing of anyone who voices disapproval of Israeli policies or expresses empathy with Palestinians is the latest manifestation of an us-versus-them mentality that has been simmering for decades." This last is important. The attitude is long-standing and does not arise from rally-around-the flag pressures attendant on the Gaza War; to disentangle the us-versus-them dichotomy entails probing the

etiology of authoritarianism, which, I have written about in CounterPunch articles, stems at least in part from the introjection of the Holocaust experience, so horrendous and dehumanizing as to lead to identification with the oppressor, and in turn, perversely, a set of psychodynamics where the oppressed become themselves, as now, oppressors. Palestinians are being made to recapitulate the suffering of the Jews, with the same coldness, indifference, lack of affect, as in the original.

This is what makes Israel so dangerous (to itself and others), a routinization of conquest, superiority, if not blood-lust as well. Even the “Israeli peace camp,” the writer holds, can be faulted. Because it “remains obsessively focused on stopping settlement expansion and pursuing the ever-elusive two-state solution while ignoring Israel’s failure to separate religion and the state and guarantee equal rights for Arab citizens,” [it] has been incapable of challenging this mentality.” In fairness to Zonszein, it is I who speaks of conquest, superiority and blood-lust; the writer does not go that far. But going far enough, as in this succinct indictment: “Israeli society has been unable and unwilling to overcome an exclusivist ethno-religious nationalism that privileges Jewish citizens and is represented politically by the religious settler movement and the increasingly conservative secular right.” As for the Left? “Israel’s liberal, progressive forces remain weak in the face of a robust economy that profits from occupation while international inaction reinforces the status quo.” Thus, “In their attempt to juggle being both Jewish and democratic, most Israelis are choosing the former at the expense of the latter.”

Ethnocentrism is the refuge of absolutist perceptions of the world and the authoritarian framework of mental security. Zonszein’s observation is acute: The us-versus-them mentality, given that Israel has never “genuinely addressed the fact that non-Jewish Arabs” constitute one-fifth of the population, and that it “has also never clearly defined its borders, preferring to keep them vague and porous,” and most important, it has not “defined what it means to be ‘Israeli,’ as distinct from being ‘Jewish,’ leaving a vacuum that has been filled by nationalist and religious ideologues,” all of that has allowed the us-them dichotomy “to bleed into Israeli Jewish society.” I would call it INTEGRAL to the society. Hence: “‘Us’ no longer refers to any Jewish citizen, and ‘them’ to any Palestinian. Now, ‘us’ means all those who defend the status quo of occupation and settlement expansion, including many Christian evangelicals and Republicans in America. And ‘them’ means anyone who tries to challenge that status quo, whether a rabbi, a dissenting Israeli soldier or the president of the United States.” No, Zonszein is not infallible; to regard Obama as hostile to Israel’s leadership and policies, as apparently many Israelis do (see the op-ed pieces in The Times by Shmuel Rosner, noted shortly), is chillingly inaccurate.

Finally, the writer provides the example of Zeev Sternhell, an Israeli political scientist and scholar of fascism, who contends that “‘radical nationalism’ and the ‘erosion of Enlightenment values’ have reached new heights in Israel.” Sternhell stated to Haaretz, “‘To grieve for the loss of life on both sides is already an act of treason,’”—and in 2008 he had “‘already experienced Jewish extremist violence firsthand,” a settler having “‘planted a bomb in his home that wounded him.” Shana Tova.

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Here from +972 magazine, Haggai Matar’s article, “The night it became dangerous to demonstrate in Tel Aviv,” (July 13), we see in microcosm—the subheading, “The fascists attacked. Police didn’t respond in time and ran away when the sirens wailed. We were lucky to get away with

only three injured, one in the hospital and many traumatized”—the hostile environment for social protest in Israel. The writer begins: “When the sirens wailed in Tel Aviv last night [July 12] one thing was clear to us: the fascists in front of us were more dangerous than the rapidly approaching rockets.” When fellow-Israelis can call Israelis fascists, one can be heartened that not all radicals have been silenced, yet disheartened that Israel has spawned its own fascist-types. One side: “Death to Arabs!”, the other side: “Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies!” The police, as noted, fled (and weren’t providing protection anyway—this in central Tel Aviv).

Matar’s description widens: “But our fear was justified. By the end of the protest (and a little after it, when they chased us through the streets) one person who had a chair broken over his head was injured and evacuated to the hospital, another got punched hard in the head, and... dozens of others, hit, pushed, or eggs thrown at them.... And that’s how it became dangerous to demonstrate in Tel Aviv. Less so because of rockets from Gaza—more because of the fascists and the government’s incitement.” (When I speak of fascistization, it is not because of what terms demonstrators applied to hooligans, as in the article, but the institutionalized suppression of dissent, whether head-bashing, Israeli’s Channel 10 constant news-propaganda, Netanyahu’s Janus-faced apologetics, or, of course, the actual record of the IDF, Mossad, and other military-intelligence arms of the State.)

Indeed, except in an authoritarian social order, it would be hard to categorize these demonstrators as radical or Leftist. “We came,” Matar continues, “to protest the ongoing killing in Gaza, against both sides’ firing on civilians, against the occupation and to demonstrate for peace talks. We came to say that Gaza and Siderot children just want to live.” Yet, not good enough, not patriotic enough: “And there were some who didn’t want us to say those things.” Demonstrations “in the heart of Tel Aviv during a war usually bring out many dozens of police officers in order to violently disperse the demonstration, or if not that, then to separate between the protesters and counter protesters.” Not this time, when “this time it was clear there would be counter protesters.” Rather than a large police presence, the Right was free to do its work.

Let’s be specific: “Yoav Eliassi (‘The Shadow’) called his people (‘The Lions’) to demonstrate against the Left, and people wrote ahead of time on his Facebook wall that they were coming to beat people up.” The few police around, “unlike the usual setup for these situations, where the two demonstrations are allowed to take place facing one another from across the street,” placed “the fascists... right next to our demonstration, calling out racist slogans and wishing death to those protesting for peace and against the fighting.” A situation with which I am entirely familiar, as I’m sure many CP readers and contributors are as well: “All attempts to encourage the police to further separate the two groups, and to call for backup, were to no avail.”

Matar’s plaintive appeal for justice resonates down the ages of radicalism: “It also made no difference when once in a while a fascist went around the policemen, attacked protesters and tore up signs, or when they started tossing eggs. It made no difference that fascists had attacked demonstrators before (for example just two weeks ago at the end of the demonstration outside the Defense Ministry) and the lesson was not learned—that these are the same gangs, among them masked men who rioted in Jerusalem just a week and a half ago, attacking Arabs.” (I confess, the term “fascist,” not only as used above, in the form of institutionalized suppression of dissent, but the gut-happening down in the street, does in fact apply—that Israel allows or even witnesses this, fully warrants the judgment. To those of my readers who were active in the civil rights struggle in

the American South in the 1950s-60s, the account would be all too familiar—from which one might draw the same conclusion about the fascistization of the society.) And then the jarring punch line, wholly warranted: “On the heels of the slogans and the incitement coming from the government, Mohammad Abu Khdeir was kidnapped and burned to death.” (Fascism? Khdeir. Fascism? Schwerner-Chaney-Goodman.)

This, then, is Israel: “And then came the siren. The policemen disappeared. And the fascists attacked. They chased down people who were running to shelter, pushing them, swearing at them and sexually harassing them. With no other choice, we grouped up tightly, surrounded by a human chain, linked arm to arm. We called out all the slogans we had, to keep up morale and unity, to stay safe from fear, to cheer up in the face of the menacing, impassioned mass in front of us.” Sirens, on then off then on, an attempt to flee to a café on the corner of Ben Tsion Boulevard and King George Street: “They stormed the café, broke cups, threw people on the ground and on tables....” Finally police arrived.

The account has a somber conclusion, “I have to say this clearly: it is not just these fascists, Eliassi and his people, or those carrying [Foreign Minister] Liberman’s posters and the rest of the thugs. It comes from the top. It comes from a government which serially incites against Arabs and the left. It comes from MK Yariv Levin sitting in the Channel 10 News studio, boldly lying about the Gaza siege policy, and refusing to allow Ron Cohen from Physicians for Human Rights to talk, calling him a liar, saying Channel 10 was derelict in its duty when it allows the government to be criticized on the air—criticism which was entirely hard, dry facts.” And enough to bring tears as we approach another Yom Kippur, I quote Matar: “And it comes from a prime minister who has been silent for weeks while masses flood the streets, attacking Arabs, swearing, humiliating, a whole population group feeling threatened and isolated, with nobody to turn to.” And this in July, long before Gaza itself was turned into a wasteland of destruction.

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Then we have the good Israeli citizens, liberals to a tee, here, New York Times op-ed contributor, Shmuel Rosner, who perfectly fits the Ethnocentric Personality, projecting hostility for whomever dares criticize Israel in whatever way, promoting instead the idea of Our Big Family, a Gemeinschaft of happy warriors, bonded together in mutual trust, while all others are, and must be treated as, Outsiders. I exaggerate not; the oozing of self-righteous goodness notwithstanding, the argument is hardness itself, punitive to Critic and Enemy alike, even more, the former, for not showing sufficient attachment to Israel. Rosner starts with what I can only think of as Israel’s self-encasement, political-structural solipsism, or what one of our writers called an exclusivist identity. His piece, “Israel’s Fair-Weather Fans,” (Aug. 7)—the title already a tip-off about not trusting (especially American) Jews who do not give unconditional devotion to Israel—begins with a song: “The Israeli song ‘Ein Li Eretz Acheret’ is a curious tune. ‘I have no other country,’ go to the lyrics, ‘even if my land is on fire.’”

Translation (from what I learned from dear Miss Cummings, my fascist world history teacher in tenth grade): My Country Right or Wrong. For Rosner, both left and right claim it; as for himself, “I was reminded of the song in recent days [although early August may seem distant, it comes well into the bombing campaign in Gaza] as I read a string of articles by smart, savvy, knowledgeable, non-Israeli Jews, who say that the brutal war in Gaza has made them question their Zionism.”



Perish the thought, ungrateful, smart-alecky shmucks. Astonishing, they have no right to criticize (here we are perhaps getting the underside of the “self-hating” Jew argument that is used to stifle dissent): “What unites these writers, of course, is that all of them do have another country. And that’s why, when push comes to shove, the Israeli government doesn’t—and **SHOULDN’T**—listen to them.” (My caps.)

Ethnocentrism by strictest definition, a closing down via the us-them dichotomy, embittered by the fact, sarcastically offered, that “there’s a heart-warming side to their articles; they are all clearly concerned about Israel.”

That cannot be. To be concerned must be predicated on trust, in this case, trust in whatever Israel is, says, does, otherwise merely fair-weather fans who support Israel only when they choose, happen to agree, or find it convenient. Wanted, therefore, though Rosner doesn’t use the term: **TRUE BELIEVERS**. On one hand, they are concerned, but on the other, “they are disappointed, sometimes horrified, by an Israel for which they still care, but not as much as they used to.” That, presumably, is their mortal sin. Roger Cohen in *The Times* “argued that current Israeli policies are a ‘betrayal of the Zionism in which I still believe.’” This is unacceptable; one cannot affirm Zionism, and still criticize Israeli policies. And if their arguments are similar, “their conclusions are also similar: They are ‘less sympathetic’ to Israel than before” (Jonathan Chait). In summary, “As a group, they are a shining example of a phenomenon that *Atlantic Monthly* and *Haaretz* columnist Peter Beinart has popularized: the distancing of liberal Jews from Israel, especially in the United States.”

One detects the venom seeping out: “The core of Mr. Beinart’s argument is that ‘particularly in the younger generations, fewer and fewer American Jewish liberals are Zionists’ because of Israel’s hawkish policies. It’s a shaky theory, and experts still argue about the scope of the trend.” Still, as with “the wildly popular Jewish comedian Jon Stewart,” undoubtedly “many liberal Jews feel uncomfortable with Israel,” Stewart arguing that if ‘Israel continues to elect governments hostile to a viable Palestinian state—the American mood will incrementally shift.’” Here Rosner weighs in: “This is a bleak prediction, because support from America is a cornerstone of Israel’s security.” However, the threat follows, that Israel has the right of unilateral action, a path of going-it-alone, a theme of Independence mixed with recriminations (dressed in psychological terms) against those who have deserted it: “If Jewish liberals aim to erode that support, they should remember that Israel has managed in the past to make do, even with weakened American support. But I assume their motivation is different. Sometimes it feels as if liberal Zionist critics are trying to ensure that Israel’s deeds do not rub off on them. At other times, it feels as if they’re trying to clear their conscience of something for which they feel partially responsible.”

Why give space and attention to Rosner? Because he so accurately typifies the liberal Israeli mindset—obviously others would not even bother with supposed soul-searching to justify Israel’s domestic and international policies and agenda, explanations of any kind taken as a sign of weakness. Rosner at least opens the wider Israeli mindset, beyond liberal (which, with more accommodating rhetoric, shares with the full-scale hawkish, Rightist perspective most if not all the essential themes and ideological premises), thus enabling one to gather how profoundly deep ethnocentrism runs in the society. You are **FOR** us or **AGAINST** us, no middle ground tolerated. He states: “They [Jewish liberals—it seems that more than Hamas, he is particularly drawn to attacking them, the Enemy Within The Gate, who, subverting the whole, had to be pushed out] seem to

believe that the implied threat that Israel might lose Jewish supporters abroad will somehow convince the government to alter its policies.” Not on your life. “This is,” he continues, “a self-aggrandizing fantasy and reveals a poor grasp of the way Israel operates.”

How therefore does Israel operate? If need be, he implies, through Splendid Isolation (an ethnocentric drawing inward, too arrogant to seek compromise or understanding), “To put it bluntly: These Jews are very important, but not nearly important enough to make Israelis pursue policies that put Israeli lives at risk.” Even if their own unwise policies, a self-willed risk-taking, put still more lives at risk? Not possible. Strangely, peace is never considered a viable option, except as issued at the point of the bayonet. If there be criticism, let it be non-critical, the touchy-feeling warmth of the totally accepting, infantilization of the willing subject: “If all Jews are a family, it would be natural for Israelis to expect the unconditional love of their non-Israeli Jewish kin. If Jews aren’t a family, and their support can be withdrawn, then Israelis have no reason to pay special attention to the complaints of non-Israeli Jews.”

Nicely put—ethnocentrism even within world Jewry. Rosner, swept along by the logic of his argument, writes: “Moreover, the threat of liberal Jews distancing themselves from Israel is a hollow one. Jews of other nationalities are the proud and patriotic citizens of other countries, and they are free to make the decision to detach themselves from THE GREATEST JEWISH ENTERPRISE of the last two millenniums.” (My caps.) Israel is still the only show, or rather team, in town (speaking of infantilization): “But they aren’t like baseball fans who move from New York to Boston and, with great difficulty, stop rooting for the Yankees and learn to cheer for the Red Sox.” Crescendo: “If they still want to root for a Jewish state, there’s no substitute for Israel. If they believe there is a need for Jewish sovereignty, Israel is the only option available to them. Like in that song, there is no other country even if the land is on fire.”

But the land is on fire, or more, in the heated minds of a nation irreconcilable, unbudging, convinced of its own moral worth—for which Atonement is a meaningless word. The Israeli: Atone for what? Spitting in the face of God on Yom Kippur.

Critics are without standing (apparently, as we’ve seen, within Israel as well). Inside or outside, doesn’t matter: criticism is per se “liberal” and of no account: “Clearly, these critics of Israel’s behavior believe that Israelis themselves would be safer if the country adopted their prescribed liberal policies. That might be true, but it makes no difference.” A drink from the poison chalice: “On matters of life and death, war and peace, Israelis are going to make their own decisions. If they lose the support of some liberal Jews over it [conservatives, Jew or gentile, no problem], that would be regrettable, but so be it.” That wonderful defiance capturing the Israeli spirit: “Israel will have to learn to survive without that support, and I’m certain it will.”

In “Who Killed the Israeli Left?”—a later Times op-ed (Sept. 7)—Rosner gleefully sticks it to the Left. We’ve seen enough, except for the point on Obama, a mischaracterization of POTUS as though fitting into that category. The Left in Israel killed itself primarily by not being anti-Left, i.e., it failed to show the necessary enthusiasm for war and intervention expected in the Knesset, and most basic, it allegedly was a persistent critic of the government (which I doubt). But his basic point is that Israel is not going to stand the gaff of any nation, including the US; this would only make it more obdurate, more determined in its ways. Gaza has had its effect domestically: “It is therefore amusing to follow the latest raging Israeli debate prompted by some Israelis’ threats to jump ship

and leave the country.” So what? The population is increasing anyway. Implicitly, they will not be missed. “For educated, liberal Israelis it’s easy to air one’s frustrations with the country and grab a headline by declaring their intention to leave.”

Rosner joyfully describes a vicious circle: “Certain Israeli leftists feel sidelined and powerless and therefore they threaten to leave, which makes the rest of Israelis even less attentive to their views. (Why would we listen to those who don’t even want to live here?) This, in turn, makes the leftists feel even more isolated.” Unwittingly he helps to support if not confirm my analysis of Israeli fascistization now taking place (except that I see the trend as more long-term certainly by the decade of the 1930s, as Arno Mayer’s magnificent *Plowshares into Swords* makes clear in the warnings of Einstein and Freud): “The Israeli left is in trouble, as most leftists would admit—and the Gaza war that ended two weeks ago put it even under more pressure. During the war, Israelis’ sense of unity and purpose became pronounced, leaving the war’s few domestic opponents feeling marginalized.” He explains further: “After the war, things got worse for the left; voters now seem even more stubborn in their support of rightwing prescriptions of policies.” Polls show “rightwing parties are getting stronger,” and that projected Knesset seats “for the current right-of-center coalition have skyrocketed.” Support for the “left has eroded,” the reason cited: “This is first and foremost a byproduct of the region we live in. Israelis look at the neighborhood and instinctively cling to their guns. But there is also a second, often neglected, reason for the Israeli left’s demise.”

In a nutshell, the international community had been the Israeli “left’s most significant ally,” so that “a shrinking left [as the peace process floundered] found consolation in the continued support of liberal Europeans and Americans (Jewish Americans included). And the less the left was able to convince fellow Israelis to adhere to its remedies, to free Palestinian prisoners or freeze settlements, the more it tended to find consolation in international support and to invite international intervention and pressure on Israel’s government.” The result is easily predictable: “And the more the left invited foreign pressure on Israel, the less legitimate its actions became in the eyes of non-leftist Israelis.” Criticism is not wanted, what I would call, a conditioned authoritarianism or defensive inner shield of intensified guilt, so that when one moves from domestic to foreign sources, the lid is clamped down equally tightly.

Permutations of the vicious cycle: the Left is weakened in Israeli eyes by appealing to the international community; that community in turn is more greatly ignored precisely because of a weakened domestic Left. Authoritarianism feeds on itself, a reason for its systemic appeal: “International encouragement of Israel’s left was instrumental in killing it. The outside world promoted the unpopular views [already confirmation of the Rightist political disposition] of an Israeli political minority, giving the left an inflated sense of its own importance domestically. This illusion led to despair, and then to alienation from mainstream Israeli society—all resulting in a further reduction of the left’s political allure.”

Cheap psychologizing on Rosner’s part? Perhaps, but nonetheless quite accurate about the Israeli mindset’s hostility toward the Left, no, more than the Left, hostility toward human life, other than the domination of others, its own supremacist ego alone worthy of regard and full-entitlement to the benefits of living. Here enter Obama: “They [other nations] didn’t see that relying on a dwindling political camp would only reduce their ability to impact Israel’s policies. [Parenthetically, when Obama relies on the Left the stars will no longer be in alignment.] International players, notably President Barack Obama, put pressure on Israel, in part because of the encouragement of the Israeli

left. The result was disastrous for the White House: Israel lost faith in Mr. Obama (and most other international players) and hence became less inclined to heed his advice or take a chance with his proposed policies.” To place Obama on the Left is proof-positive, to me, of Israel’s collision with history.

My New York Times Comment on the Zonszein op-ed article, Sept. 27, follows:

Thank you Mairav for raising a moral voice against what Israel has become, the collective introjection of the vile hatreds spawned by Naziism. Israel hides behind the “Jewish State” to practice criminal policies of regimentation and oppression that violate the fundamental tenets of Judaism.

Israel desecrates Judaism. Sadly I say this on the Holydays fresh from observance at my schul. You are right: the us-them dichotomy, essence of ethnocentrism, now includes fellow Jews among the “them,” who do not tow the mark, while increasingly fascist-minded war-obsessed people, whether Jew or non-Jew, become part of “us.”

Israel is a textbook case of Adorno et al, “The Authoritarian Personality,” wherein ethnocentrism—exactly the behavior and policies so well described in the op-ed—leads to repression, reactionary social values, not least, a fascistic social structure.

What would the SIX MILLION say (if they could) if they knew that modern Israel possesses the same traits that sent them to the ovens? Would they be proud of the hooliganism? Would they think, as I suspect they would, that horrible as the current deeds, including not only the slaughter of Gaza but the suppression of criticism within Israel, must share place with the failure of Israel government and public opinion to condemn the violence directed inward to Israeli society?

Where the voices of Reason? Peace? Compassionate Judaism? Instead a cesspool of immorality, hubris, bloodlust that I think God will punish.

OCTOBER 3, 2014

### **The Response to ISIS**

Perhaps rigor mortis is better, not merely rigidity in principle and/or practice, but rigidity of the whole entity setting in after death (in this case, rather, DECLINE as a vital civilization). ISIS, the specific subclass of terrorism on the current agenda (even seeming to displace Russia and China) as threatening America, Democracy, and the Free World, has been raised to the status of the universal anti-Christ, malevolence incarnate, and fueling America’s comeback to unilateral world dominance, a position from which it had been falling through the changing structure of international power. ISIS is like a life raft America reaches for in the multipolar world circumventing its customary position of unilateral political-economic-military dominance. In that light, it serves the function that communism did (and perhaps emotively still does) a half-century ago: the Hated Object to rationalize, legitimate, prosecute a course of global intervention, eradication of which is essential to national identity and survival.

America is Edisonian: we invent things, but not necessarily what Thomas Alva had in mind. We invent that which will accomplish three goals, preferably simultaneously: Unify the nation (especially in the face of real or imagined class division); activate a huge military establishment (which translates into periodic if not continuous war and intervention); succor a capitalistic system (which might otherwise be at increasing risk of structural breakdown) prone, by its chicanery and misallocation of priorities, to an endemic condition of underconsumption exacerbated by a shriveling social safety net). Normality is a curse, unless, as now happens, the normality of war. Instead, constant jolts of fear keep the State and Capitalism going—but more, keep them growing closer, each reinforcing, and creating the need for, unity, mutual protection, ever-expanding aggressiveness.

Welcome aboard, ISIS; if you didn't exist, we'd be forced to invent you. Here, let the reasoning of Jean-Paul Sartre be our guide. I wrote an article in *Agricultural History* a half-century ago, "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism, and the Historian," which strangely resonates with the present moment, testifying precisely to the ideological rigorism of today, called then by the term, "consensus," a societal phenomenon whose purpose was to deny social protest past and current in favor of a grand celebration of Exceptionalism. Populism was in a sense our ISIS, as Cold War hysteria and historians' opportunism to get on the bandwagon, in the 1950s-60s, magnified fears, induced conformity, and bludgeoned dissent. A shabby record in a still shabbier times.

Sartre's "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" uncovers the psychodynamics of authoritarianism, specifically, the fashioning of a scapegoat to hide one's own (and here, society's own) hidden fears and tenacious clinging to the status quo. For Sartre, the anti-Semite hates everything but the Jew: "He is a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews of course, but of himself, of his conscience, his freedom, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitude, of change, of society and the world; of everything except the Jews." My own, 1965: "This too captures the significance of our own attack on the Populist movement as an escape from ourselves and the challenges of our age." In our discussion, remember ISIS as a possible functional equivalent, summoning the same psychodynamics in response to challenge, as Populism had been many years ago.

In a preceding passage I wrote: "It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the critics of Populism and the society which finds the charges [anti-Semitism, xenophobia, premodernism] so congenial to its temperament exhibit the very traits of authoritarianism they impute to others.... Thus, Populism becomes for the historian and the larger society what the Jew is for the anti-Semite. Both historian and anti-Semite require a scapegoat, and the character of that scapegoat is incidental. For each hates not Populists or Jews but himself. Each cannot affirm man, each has little faith in human potentiality or confidence in man's ability to shape the future and rationally control society, each cannot confront the possibilities of self-fulfillment in humanity—and frightened by these thoughts, each turns blindly to dependence on the homogeneous folk or the static past. In the final analysis, the denigration of Populism signifies the fear of man."

ISIS is our scapegoat, as, under the capacious tent of counterterrorism and defense of the homeland, other groups have preceded and no doubt will follow it. ISIS keeps the hairpin trigger of militarism and echoing patriotism on steady alert—surveillance, war, intervention, increasingly blind submission to the framework of power, in sum, ruling-groups' idealization of what America is and must continue to be, as the natural fruit of an American society giving tacit admission to its own failure by its strident expression of hegemonic declaration and ideological rigidity. Again Sartre, in

what I said “reaches to the innermost recesses of the authoritarian mind”—on reflection 49 years later appears to me the uncanny exactitude of anticipatory vision which best delineates America today: “Anti-Semitism, in a word, is fear of man’s fate. The anti-Semite is the man who wants to be a pitiless stone, furious torrent, devastating lightning: in short, everything but a man.”

That, I submit, is the American mentalset, a nation craving, as Sartre says elsewhere, the durability of stone: a face of hardness to the world, fearful of introspection, of ever stopping to inspect the record of shock-and-awe intervention, paramilitary-sourced regime change, never-ceasing weapons development, stockpiling, and modernization of existing stock, and, twin of this psychological closed system, hubris and the boastful claims of divinely-ordered superiority. ISIS must be accorded spontaneous creation to cover America’s tracks as to the fundamental takeover of the Middle East, which included the invasion of Iraq leading ultimately to ISIS’s formation and growth; hence as its parent in having responsibility for the ensuing turmoil. But it also must be accorded world-shaking proportions to justify the continued permanent state of emergency, bombing Syria and turning ISIS itself (now that Ukraine is losing its luster) into the front-line ranks of the Wider Threat, these being the latest manifestation of US power. A not-so-subtle linkage has been created with Russia and China, as well as the argument laid for ISIS’s own ultimate threat of encroachment on American soil.

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Recently, Peter Baker and Eric Schmitt in a New York Times article, “Many Missteps in Assessment of ISIS Threat,” (Sept. 29), point out the recriminations flying back and forth between the White House and the intelligence community over when the existence, actions, and territorial ambitions of ISIS became the focus of attention. They do not, however, examine the causation, long- or short-term, for its formation. That is important, because simply taking ISIS as what today is termed an existential threat erases the US role in and complicity for its coming into being and, to a large extent, the shaping of its objectives, thus setting the stage for American bombing engagements and the possible pretext for enlarging war plans, as already evident by attacks within Syria. Inadvertently, Baker-Schmitt, as to why the tardy response to ISIS, suggest the wider stretch toward US global hegemony: “But the reports [2013 classified documents on a threat and also the “deteriorating readiness” of Iraqi troops], they [senior military and intelligence officers] said, generated little attention in a White House consumed with multiple brush fires and reluctant to be drawn back into Iraq.” Said one senior intelligence official: “Some of us were pushing the reporting, but the White House just didn’t pay attention to it. They were preoccupied with other crises. This just wasn’t a big priority.”

Now it is. And the Obama administration goes on the propaganda offensive within government itself, so as not to receive blame. Obama, in a broadcast interview, “pointing to the agencies without mentioning any misjudgments of his own... left intelligence officials bristling about being made into scapegoats and critics complaining that he was trying to avoid responsibility.” His press secretary, also inadvertently, made clear Obama prized his connection to the intelligence community. Obama is “commander in chief and he’s the one who takes responsibility,” followed by the caveat, “and the president continues to have the highest degree of confidence in our intelligence community to continue to provide that advice.” That’s a telling sign, not of weakness or vacillation, but of closeness and agreement, whenever POTUS is not up to the (military) mark. Blame turned instead on Maliki for antagonizing Sunnis. More blame—too many targets, a dispersal of energies:

According to another official, “The Syria policy people are so focused on taking down Assad, they were blind to this [ISIS] problem.”

It seems the work of imperialism never ends, America already up to its neck in deposing Assad. But the capture of Falluja and Ramadi got Obama’s attention. How, one might ask, does Obama get away with flagrant violation of international law? One reason, applied to the domestic scene (and a still compliant set of friends and allies), but hardly bought into by Putin and Li, is the mythology of peacemaker and world statesman which The Times, as here, contributes its part: “Even so [the threat assessment of the Defense Intelligence Agency to Congress on Feb. 11 on ISIS territorial gains], Mr. Obama was determined not to let the United States be dragged back into a war that he had opposed from the start and that he had promised during his first campaign for the White House to end.” Doubtful, to say the least, except for election purposes. Yet, six years out, Baker-Schmitt embellishment of the record continues. Aides said that Obama “was convinced the United States was too quick to pull the military lever whenever it confronted a foreign crisis. He would not repeat what he considered the mistake of his predecessor President George W. Bush.” The bombings in Iraq and Syria are therefore a nonevent.

MY New York Times Comment on the Baker-Schmitt article, Sept. 30, follows:

First, it is enjoyable to see the Executive and the intelligence community at each other’s throat, an in-fighting to cover over the obsession of each with unwarranted intervention. Absent the Iraq invasion, or, with Obama, its continuation, would there even have been ISIS?

The US creates mayhem and the rise of extremism because of its own hell-bent quest for global hegemony, a status it once held, but with the rise of Russia and China as world-players, and thus, the de-centered international power system, it [US] acts with renewed desperation to remain on top.

If the intelligence boys could not see 9/11, how expect them to see ISIS—a bunch of ignorant boastful defense “experts” who’d do better at Goldman Sachs. And Obama, playing geopolitical strategist, is laughable—a con man who pulled himself up the ladder of political opportunism.

The lesson: STOP intervening where the US presence, founded exclusively on self-interest, is not wanted. We finance and arm the Taliban against Russia, and look what happens. Ditto, practically every opposition group, our plans exploding in our face.

Currently, the US is the primary aggressor nation in the world, even more activated under Democratic than Republican auspices. And the future doesn’t look bright: Mrs. Clinton makes Margaret Thatcher look like Mother Theresa, a war vulture of the first water. After ISIS, be assured that more ISISs await in the wings, products of US irresponsible world behavior.

OCTOBER 13, 2014

## **The Ebola of American Radicalism**

Despite a vital history of social struggle as manifested in labor upheaval (think: Great Railway Strike of 1877, Homestead, Pullman, Sit-down Strikes of the 30s, CIO organization drives, to name but a few highlights) and the Civil Rights Movement from say 1910-70, it has been difficult to establish a permanent beachhead for radicalism in America. I once thought the fault lay with an overwhelming American repression whenever the status quo even appeared to be threatened, much less when the consensus-surface was actually broken by the fundamental dissent that did occur. “Consensus” is an ideological tool of America’s ruling groups, dutifully recorded and embellished by historians. Yet, as practical description of the relative weakness of radicalism in America, it is sadly correct. One cannot keep pointing to repression for explanation, when it is the groups themselves which internally may have accepted the ideological boundaries keeping them if not enslaved (psychologically) then at least willing accomplices in their own castration as radical social forces.

My few readers know I have the perhaps bad habit to trying to combine the grand and the miniscule, social theory and seemingly minor events, happenings, statements, etc. Where did I pick up this analytic (if you will) framework? A theoretical bent, from Barrington Moore, Marxist study groups in Cambridge, writings of contemporary radicals, from Marcuse to Wright Mills, but the interactive process dates from still earlier, as in reading Adorno, Myrdal, the now-forgotten sociologist Danilo Dolci in his Report from Palermo (Did God cause poverty?). We tend to work in the middle range, losing specificity as a motive force for driving us deeper into social phenomena and questioning prevailing assumptions. Yes, nothing, most of all, radicalism, should be set off-limits, exempt from critical awareness, allowed the status of the poseur coasting on its own real or imagined reputation.

From the standpoint of false consciousness, American radicalism has always had to wage an uphill battle (two strikes against it, as it were), for reasons more observable than explainable. I like the formulation of Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* more than 60 years ago (shortly before I studied with him): roughly this—American radicalism was more American than it was radical. Hartz was obsessed (I say that with respect and admiration) with Lockean liberalism as the formative ideological base of America. We were born mature, that is, ideologically precast, but unlike what today’s observer might conclude from that, liberalism was already CAPITALISTIC, an impregnation of the property right in the American value system, rendering capitalism a monolithic reality in the American cosmos.

I challenged Hartz at the time, seeing his work as one more variant of consensus theorization, and in my dissertation (then later, book) on Populism he was kind enough to admit that this movement broke the consensus mold he had constructed. It is a brittle mold, too many glorious exceptions to a simplistic Lockean America—and yet, and yet, the capitalistic hold on the American Mind (if one can speak in such generalities) is undeniable. And by and large, I suggest, one can: a uniqueness and clarity of capitalistic institutions and values, a puristic capitalism if you will, not found elsewhere; and for me, a poison seeping into the American soul, not least because acting to co-opt, smother, transvalue radicalism itself into something else, the shrinking of ideological boundaries so that radicals themselves become oblivious to their own potential power and settle for half-measures as though themselves the mounting of the barricades and glorious victories.



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For many American blacks, the election of Barack Obama as POTUS is just such a victory, sheathing him in knightly armor, a nobleman always on the ramparts fighting the good fight. Not all members of the black community subscribe to this myth (for it is certainly that!), particularly those who have personally experienced a more generalized radicalism or have kept their wits about them in the face of growing economic disparities, often along racial lines. But racial solidarity, which gives Obama a free pass, as though a defensive shield rises up, taking the form almost if not quite of blind adoration, characterizes a rampaging false consciousness to which I allude. This is harmful, beyond the needs of blacks, which is considerable in its own right as comprising the disproportionately poor and unemployed, for it affects what little solidarity that remains (if any, still) of a unified radicalism which was its strength in former times.

American radicalism once fused in common struggle a number of constituent groups; for purposes of illustration, let's start from the New Deal through the assassination of Martin Luther King, where there was a viable coalition mutually reinforcing in nature. I leave many out of this paradigm of social protest, but industrial labor, Jews and blacks—not everyone in each community, but enough to afford the point—stuck together on issues even when peculiar to one alone. Social justice was in the air. Unite and fight, was the recognizable watchword. Yet, gradually through the 1960s (and possibly earlier) we see an erosion process at work, a diminution of radicalism, for labor, a growing away from industrial unionism and slow disengagement from progressive politics and protest (as in the stand on Vietnam), for Jews, an Israel-first set of priorities which spilled over into conservatism per se, militarism, and the disengagement from civil rights at home and countenancing or actively supporting the oppression of Palestinians abroad, and for blacks, the important move away from CLASS as an organizing principle of life to RACE as a seemingly sole mode of social and psychological identity.

This was not Dr. King's way, for he died on the Cross not of the antiwar movement but of that of the Poor People's Campaign, or actually, their interrelatedness. And with his death, I sincerely believe, racial politics took over, to the abandonment of radicalism. In the time period I mentioned, we see A. Philip Randolph and Paul Robeson, we see Bob Moses at COFO headquarters in Jackson during Mississippi Freedom Summer, we see a young black veteran fresh from organizing Mississippi voters that summer (that summer, the real and symbolic unity of Jews and blacks with the murder of Schwerner-Chaney-Goodman), now, 1967, organizing in East Detroit, and speaking, or trying to, at an antiwar rally, surrounded by CIA-supported Nazi-like hecklers from Breakthrough surrounding us, not letting him be heard, he—who had seen so much—trembling, I, arms locked around his waist holding him together (he twice my size), suddenly pointing to the flagpole on the Wayne State campus and saying, "That's your flag, baby, not mine," a supreme moment in consciousness going beyond race, going to the essence of an American structure of class dominance, militarism, an anguished cry for the resurgence of radicalism in America.

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This as background for everything Barack Obama is not, and instead, the fragmentation of that splendid unity, the splitting apart into its constituents, separated from each other, of the radicalism of the past, so that turning inward, no longer drawing strength from each other, each reveals its inner propensity for identity on solipsistic lines, going-it-alone divorced from the struggle for a

common humanity. Blacks, again not all, but enough, including political leaders, like John Lewis, who once distinguished themselves in the Good Fight, have transformed Obama into an Icon of racial arrival in the corridors of power and thus new-found self- and social-respect. A Messiah of sorts, deserving unquestioned loyalty.

Here then the minor detail occasioning this article: the intruder, ten days ago, climbing the White House fence and penetrating the president's inner sanctum. Yes, worthy of attention, although crowding out significant international news and exaggerating the threat to his life (he was away in any case). But the media would not let go. Nor apparently would the black community as a whole, black members of Congress directing their rage at the Secret Service, and, from public opinion surveys in the community itself, a refrain of conspiracy theory alleging the Secret Service had set Obama up through its deliberate laxness (if not something worse). Granted, it is natural to express solicitude for the safety and welfare of any president, and the racial bond between a black president and the black community, even more so. Yet, the element of conspiracy theory, false consciousness in extremis, deserves a word, Obama's get-out-of-jail card (to me, literally so, for his war crimes should have made him a prime candidate for trial and prosecution before the International Criminal Court, drone assassination being a compelling bill of particular).

Interesting here is not Obama, but the political affect (racial solidarity) surrounding and protecting him at the hands of blacks. To say he doesn't deserve this admiration convinces no-one, although his high office has been the center of war, intervention, economic deregulation, favoritism to Wall Street, the closeness to the military and intelligence communities, evisceration of civil liberties (as in Espionage Act prosecution of whistle-blowers), massive surveillance of the American people, all issues which seemingly do not touch on blacks, but in a different time-period would have been recognized by blacks as decisive to the state of democracy in America, and therefore, social justice and their own enjoyment of freedom and well-being. Racial solidarity wipes the slate clean! Nothing to protest except finally police brutality, while the larger picture of class-stratified militaristic global hegemony—correlating to an authoritarian political-social framework having nothing to offer blacks, whose fate rests on thoroughgoing equality—vanishes in the smile of the Anointed One.

Obama cannot be credited with alone arresting the civil rights movement, which, as noted, was part of a unifying progressive social force at least potentially in conflict with the dominant structure and trends of American monopoly capital. Singling out blacks for the diminution of radicalism is inaccurate and unfair, given how other coalition members also capitulated to the pressures of war, intervention, patriotism, political blandishment, crass manipulation and diversions. Equally unfair perhaps is what I am about to say: Precisely because blacks historically (through the present) have been the most oppressed group in American society, therefore having most to lose and suffering most, could be expected to act and serve as the core of societal transformation, the vanguard of American institutional democratization. That is a heavy burden to shoulder, as though placing the onus on the victim; however, it also is incentive for not drifting out of focus through false consciousness. More, it should be incentive for further radicalization.

Instead, following the death of Dr. King, who combined antiwar protest with economic radicalism (the Poor People's Campaign), we have witnessed a flight to color per se, the demagoguery of race, which has tied blacks themselves, handcuffed, blinded, into a neatly-tied bundle delivered to the Democratic party, and into the undeserving arms of Obama. Obama has

done nothing for blacks as members of the community of the poor, except pour snake oil on injured sensibilities to create vicarious bonds of pride, and worse, has robbed blacks of their class identity, twisting them into self-castrating supplicants at the feet of the US power structure, willing subjects of a world counterrevolutionary posture and widening class differences at home.

Obama deserves contempt on the part of blacks, not adulation. And the blacks he has brought into high places in government, Holder, Jarrett, Rice, are exactly the Servants of Power simultaneously betraying the promise of blacks as a transcendent societal force for political-economic-structural EQUALITY and as the articulator of an authentic humanness beyond race and class to the integral dignity of all individuals. You doubt this last? Then listen to the songs of Paul Robeson, who would have found, as surely Dr. King would also, Obama's militarism, market fundamentalism, abrogation of civil liberties, obsession with the need for government secrecy and massive surveillance of Americans, despicable. *Ballad for Americans* was written for a different age, a different America, not for the black figurehead of a white—in ethos if not always in color—military-security-financial power system. The black president nullifies the beauty and significance of blackness, which, instead of racial solidarity, can be taken as code, in the American experience, for freedom's struggle and universal human rights.

The coalition is disintegrating: not only blacks losing their specific gravity as the source of democratic energy in America, but Jews as well, a mainstay of radicalism since 1900, partly the cross-fertilization of Europe and America, furnishing ground troops for industrial unionism, war protest, and, as perhaps the final curtain call, the civil rights movement. So my harsh comments also apply to Jews, who represent a parallel collapse of progressive social forces. Jews mired in adulation: Netanyahu, the white Obama, and Obama, the black Netanyahu; for both groups, self-castration via leadership identification.

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Sometimes, as I believe now, the trivial can be most revealing. Here the world appears to be coming apart, from disease-ravaged Africa to war-ravaged Iraq/Syria to Hong Kong demonstrations, and much else besides. Yet in the US, the brouhaha over an individual's penetration of the White House before being stopped by the Secret Service became a large-scale media event, and the occasion for blacks to demonstrate their affection for and loyalty to Obama—an opportunity to voice conspiratorial thoughts and suspicions about a Secret Service plot to assassinate him. Peter Baker picks up on this in a *New York Times* article, "Some Blacks See Secret Service as Flawed Shield for the President," (Oct. 2), which for me confirms the dulling effect of blacks' false consciousness. Conspiracy theory is generally a sign of reason abandoned for fear that it might uncover unpleasant truths.

Baker writes that Elijah Cummings, Maryland Democratic congressman, "was at the grocery store the other day when he ran into an elderly black woman who expressed growing concern about President Obama's safety. Why, she asked, wasn't he being better protected by his Secret Service agents?" He continues, "The furor that led to this week's resignation of the director of the Secret Service resonated deeply among blacks, outraged that those supposed to be guarding the first black president were somehow falling down on the job—and suspicious even without evidence that it may be deliberate."

Another black congressman, Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, reported the same: “It is something that is widespread in black circles. I’ve been hearing this [that the Secret Service was trying to expose POTUS] for some time.” The doubts Cummings and Cleaver encountered “reflect an abiding fear [among blacks] for Mr. Obama’s security...still mindful of the assassinations of Malcolm X and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.” There are solid grounds for fear; yet the difference in Obama’s case from that of other black leaders is the resulting obfuscation of public policy. We knew what Malcolm and Dr. King stood for, but Obama has been granted both a more exaggerated fear for his safety and, for that reason, endowment of qualities and positions he does not deserve. Fear translates as uncritical hero worship and into racial solidarity. We see this in former White House aide Joshua DuBois’s observation that Obama’s “security feels personal for many blacks.” He explains: “There’s a broad extended family around the country of moms and aunts and uncles who feel a real sense of kinship with this first family, and they want to make sure they’re protected and whole.”

This is only natural, but it is also counted on by Obama as a political calculation, blacks a critical electoral mass to be corralled into the party, at the same time, not coincidentally, marking their removal from the political scene as a source of potential radicalism. This last, if it were to issue as the reinvigoration of a black political consciousness that helped to activate by its example other formerly progressive groups, would be, literally, ideological-political dynamite, at the very least, cleaning out the Democratic Augean stable, but further, a fracturing of bipartisan unity on War and Wall Street, and even progression toward a third party movement avowedly radical at its foundations. Blacks must remove themselves from the octopus-tentacles of a black president, and leap over race altogether in building an equalitarian human community.

OCTOBER 14, 2014

### **Wesley Clark’s Paradigm of Global Hegemony**

Never mind the stereotype of military leaders from the fevered brow of left-wingers, going back to George Grosz’s satirical drawings of generals with spiked-Prussian helmets, ample bosoms in the manner of Hermann Goring, bedecked with five-to-seven rows of ribbons. Never mind their look-alikes and wannabes in America, composites of Douglas MacArthur, Curtis LeMay, and Dr. Strangelove, who at West Point and Annapolis (we forget that admirals also comprise this military caste system, though their names, for some reason, aren’t as familiar to us) have learned to resolve the conundrum posed and made famous by Gerald Ford, of how to chew gum and walk at the same time. Never mind the evolution of top brass via the revolving door to plum positions in the defense industries, government agencies, Wall Street (all requiring the square-jawed determination breeding confidence that covers up their nefarious activities). Rest assured that out of this fascistic-inclined mold emerges the occasional soldier-statesman, a David Petraeus, or as now, Wesley Clark, to mark the path to American Greatness, prescribing in learned words, with acumen and discernment, a doctrine of world supremacy that hardly differs in substance from that of their troglodytic compeers. Militarism = Patriotism, is all you have to know.

Our homespun Clausewitz, US Army General (ret.), former NATO supreme Allied commander in Europe, and author of the aptly titled, “Don’t Wait for the Next War: A Strategy for American Growth and Global Leadership,”—that is, why wait(?) when NOW is the time to confront China,

our major world adversary, and claim once-for-all US unilateral dominance in an American-defined international order—Clark is indeed a formidable voice of military opinion which, judging from Obama’s Pacific-first strategy, appears to resonate throughout official Washington. But now, in all modesty, he should be regarded and may so regard himself, as a “defense intellectual” like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, braided cap to the wind and ribbons in the drawer: a selfless prophet of confrontation in the Kissinger-mold, bravely and gravely facing the prospect of nonpareil conflagration in the name of freedom and democracy (a wise teacher to today’s policy makers). West Point valedictorian class of ’66, Rhodes Scholar, altogether to be taken seriously as the authentic voice of modern warfare—in brief, as I see it, one who professionalizes the use of force to secure the fruits of war, intervention, assassination, civilian deaths, saturation bombing, whatever it takes to keep America on top, albeit in scholarly language whenever possible.

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Clark’s New York Times op-ed article, “Getting Real About China: To Manage China, Fix America First,” (Oct. 11), adapted from his aforementioned book, begins with a geopolitical proposition that ensures the proper conclusion—we’ve been duped by China, and further talk of reconciliation is self-defeating: “China’s harsh suppression of political dissent, from Hong Kong to Xinjiang, and its close ties to Russia, Iran and North Korea, have finally laid to rest the dream many Western leaders have had since the 1990s: that ‘constructive engagement’ would eventually, inevitably lead to more openness and democracy.” This shedding of crocodile tears about suppression of political dissent (especially coming from an America where dissent is silenced in presumably more legitimate ways, from the narrowing of political choice to media manipulation to massive surveillance encouraging people to check the habit of critical thinking) is not the point so much as is the fear of a China-Russia rapprochement after decades of mistrust and the capacity for unified resistance to American global leadership and power. Moreover, was “constructive engagement” ever really tried since the Chinese Revolution of 1949? Except to force “openness and democracy” American-style, to wit, capitalism, commercial penetration and investment rights, etc.—which, oddly, appears to be happening despite the atmosphere of confrontation (and, for Marxists still around, a betrayal of principle, and of socialism).

When one factors in capitalist changes in China, Clark’s (and official Washington’s) opposition seems to rest, not on ideology, but on power, pure and simple, the dislodging of the US from its topmost place as the military-economic regulator of the World System to its exclusive advantage. China-Russia, no longer Mao-Stalin, but perhaps the more formidable pairing of Xi-Putin, not standing in awe of Leviathan and each rejecting multipronged encirclement, whether TPP- or EU-implemented, on America’s behalf, as now sharing common ground. Divide-and-conquer seems the geostrategic card to play so as to maintain unilateral power, whether here, the US, respecting China and Russia, or, e.g., Israel, with respect to the Palestinian Authority and Gaza. Hegemony detests competition.

For Clark, China is to blame for the failure of constructive engagement, naturally. I say, “naturally,” in that he believes America has so much to offer the world, domestically, human rights, internationally, principles of organization favoring peace. China’s crime is its assertiveness (further on, its ascendancy) in world politics, not coming hat-in-hand to the American-laid table: “Instead, the opposite [to openness and democracy] has occurred: China is more confident, more assertive, and also more closed.” The last-named is problematic, given that very ascendancy and transactional

context thereby implied. As one probes Clark's mental-set, not power but power conjoined to economic success gripes him, as though in combination affording the way out of American world domination: "Thirty-five years after Deng Xiaoping freed up the economy, the Communist Party is using material prosperity and nationalist ideology to maintain its legitimacy in the face of wrenching social tensions. It has rejected both the move toward democracy and the acceptance of human and civil rights that Americans had hoped would emerge from China's ASTONISHING ECONOMIC RISE." (caps., mine)

The last is an especially bitter pill to swallow, coming as it does under Communist Party auspices (even though, objectively, the party has made a shambles of Marxian orthodoxy), Clark's own reification of economics—what I'll term, "economism"—in which development and growth necessarily are equated with "acceptance of human and civil rights," the absence of which testifying to a sinister government of repression. That America has a tarnished record in those areas need not detain him—the target is China rather than a relative absence of internal democratization in America. In fact, he projects on to China a salient trait of US foreign policy, not, of course, seeing the irony in his charge: "Even more worrisome, China's foreign policy relies on keenly calculated self-interest [no-one, critic or supporter, would find the US deficient on this score], at the expense of the international institutions, standards and obligations the United States has sought to champion." As will be seen, beyond the UN, which America, like Israel, has often viewed with mistrust, he includes the IMF and World Bank as institutions exemplifying democracy. Not surprisingly, even thus far, Clark posits conflict, feigning disbelief, however, that it has, on China's part, a rational basis: "It increasingly views the United States as a rival and potential adversary."

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Hence the question, "What went wrong?" Clark's version of what went wrong depicts China, first, as wanting closeness to the US military as protection against Soviet expansion, and then, perceiving US weakness and decline, integrating its economic ascent with its own militaristic ambitions and finding a clear field to expand, presumably at the expense of both. This would make China a world menace, with America particularly on the path of conquest to be overcome. Essentially, a two-stage argument, China, because opposing America, once a normalization of relations with Russia was achieved, is regarded by the US as treacherous, ungrateful, the primary Enemy at the gates.

The earlier post-Revolution stage is fantasyland itself: "In the late 1970s, when the United States and China fully normalized relations ["fully," a somewhat extravagant term], Beijing sought a strategic partnership with Washington, to deter a perceived Soviet threat. By the late 1980s, China was unconcerned about the Soviets, though willing to listen and learn from the United States military." It is as though, from his perspective, Clark, quoting a "young, well-connected Communist Party leader" to the effect that friendship with America would, like the way England gave America world leadership, give China also "leadership of the world." Permit me a raised eyebrow, not that the discussion did not occur, but that the geopolitical dynamics, and the relationships themselves, were the same. Through the whole period, 1949-2014, China has been regarded as prime ground for Kennan-containment if not also and always Dulles-liberation policies, political-economic-military in nature, thought beyond reach until recently, as Obama busily positions American military "assets" in the Pacific and firms up military and/or trade alliances throughout the region.

Clark finds China having been “especially impressed by our prowess in the 1991 Persian Gulf war,” and that, while concentrating on “its agricultural, industrial and technological strength,” had made “military modernization... a second-tier priority.” Save for the growth, this was definitely a preferable situation. Then came “the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath,” and the turn-around in “China’s assessment of America,” so that now it was tasting blood and moving in for the kill: “While still respectful of our military might, China began to see the United States as a failing system, with a debt-saddled economy and a dysfunctional government, vulnerable to being replaced as the world’s leader.” Again, he has an informant, “a well-placed Chinese associate,” in 2011 confirming US fears that China sought to dominate the South China Sea, and in 2013 “this associate’s warnings had become even more ominous.” Still there is not a word about America’s military build-up in the Pacific, joint exercises with the Philippines and encouragement of Abe, in violation of the Japanese Constitution, to rearm, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership both for the exclusion of China and itself as an economic foundation for an otherwise region-wide defense system.

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The inevitable step back, scholar-general in academic mode, so as not to appear overzealous: “China doesn’t need conflict—it can achieve most of its goals by adroitly combining traditional diplomacy with its vast economic power.” That said (and a few more caveats down the road to prove himself balanced and trustworthy), Clark notes: “But neither will it avoid conflict. It has in the past used its military ‘pre-emptively’ rather than defensively [a dubious assertion]. A danger is that an ascendant China seeking recognition of its power and rights, will, whether deliberately or through miscalculation, spark conflict.” If the shoe were on the other foot in “seeking recognition of its power and rights,” would Clark find the US culpable? As for sparking conflict, the Pacific-first strategy, combined with, yes, perhaps easy to forget, Ukraine and the confrontation, utilizing the EU and NATO, with Russia, when attention is drawn to China, returns us to the source of the criticism, America, and its projection on to The Other of its own hostile plans.

Projection, but let’s skip the jargon, for this is revealing of an arrogance, self-righteousness, the claim to Exceptionalism, not on his part alone, of course, but embedded in the National Mythology justifying US world domination, which Clark quaintly phrases in the terms of liberal humanitarianism: “But the deeper strategic problem for America is China’s more fundamental challenge to the GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE of trade, law and peaceful resolution of disputes that the United States and its allies created after World War II.” (caps., mine) The setting is important; even before war’s end, we see the construction of an anti-Soviet international framework which served equally as the launching pad for an American-initiated world order of imperialism and counter-revolution. That Clark sees in that beneficence to the nth power is only fitting—and consistent with his geopolitical vision.

As he warms to the denunciation of China, underlying fears are difficult to hide, including still to this day the fear of international communism as the universal imprisonment of humankind: “China’s strategic rise—patient, nuanced and farsighted [descriptive terms of opprobrium, which in any other context might be seen as complimentary, but here that of a slithering snake ready to strike]—threatens all of this. Just as the United States has sought the worldwide adoption of democratic values and American norms of international behavior, China will seek structures and relationships that support Communist Party rule at home, and its policy that countries should not

intervene in one another's affairs." Clark regards the rejection of intervention into the internal affairs of other countries, as well he might, as a mortal sin of international politics, for what else is America's guiding principle and mechanism for ensuring world power?

Before we leave the topsy-turvy world of American imperialism (i.e., blame the other guy as you put the handcuffs on and burn down his house), we owe it to ourselves to have a further glimpse into the mind-set of the military practitioner (I would argue, from Obama on down). Clark continues: "The ascendancy of naked and direct self-interest as an organizing principle would mean a fundamental weakening of Western institutions and values, including the rule of law." Methinks he protesteth too much, for where do we most find if not nakedly-declared then practically followed SELF-INTEREST than in the case of the US, likewise, contempt for the rule of law? Reading Clark is like burrowing into the American psyche in toto, the powers of deniability and all. And he has this flourish: "This would be a step backward, toward 19th-century ideas of the balance of power and spheres of influence." He then has the chutzpah to quote the person most associated in America with those ideas: "The question, as Henry A. Kissinger has framed it, is 'whether China can work with us to create an international structure in which, perhaps for the first time in history, a rising state has been incorporated into an international system and strengthened peace and progress.'"

Translated: accommodation to American power, China's rise somehow sublimated into an international system predefined to incorporate US global hegemony as its foundation and guiding light. Poor China, a child of paranoia in viewing encirclement, military, political, economic, as inimical to its interests: "The United States will emphasize multilateral forums for resolving disputes through international law, and fulfill our commitments to allies. China, in contrast, views this international order and these formalized obligations as being heavily tilted against it." From carrier battle groups to long-range bombers to the "formalized obligations" (to which China is not a signatory and, in fact, which serve as mutual defense pacts directed against it), there may be ample grounds for suspicion of US intent.

Yet Clark's apprehension about the future is very real, considering—though he does not—the consistent record of and current provocation offered by America: "We should be under no illusion about the difficult road ahead. China operates on a long-term vision [again, often thought salutary, but perhaps now the subliminal fear, recalling the boast of the Soviet leadership, "we will bury you"], driven by its own interests. By some estimates, China's gross domestic product could surpass that of the United States sometime in the next decade. By then, Chinese military strength... will be formidable. Even without any military confrontation, the balance of power in the western Pacific will shape the Chinese predisposition to push, threaten or compromise." In other words, Stand Up Firmly against them. To be followed by a litany of threats: "The Chinese must understand that their expanding military capabilities have consequences."

The US must "strengthen its ballistic missile defense system," this with respect to China, but Clark also has the big picture in mind. Though he does not quite say it, and I may be giving him too much credit for envisioning it, the real battleground has never been China exclusively, but a world of counterrevolution, in which China and Russia become inseparable threats to American global hegemony. Here he broaches the subject: "China is closely observing events in Ukraine, and what our statements and actions there may mean for Asia. We must help China understand that a closer, more assertive alignment with Russia will only provoke the United States and our allies. The pivot to Asia makes sense, but must not come at the expense of our obligations to our allies in Europe and



elsewhere.” This caveat, if it be that, is meant both as a corrective to the Pacific-first strategy and a renewal of the emphasis on keeping pressure on Russia, whether as containment and isolation or ultimate dismemberment. The US does not feel safe, nor its interests protected, if either, or, Heaven forefend, both, provide a challenge to America’s global supremacy. Here the UN, IMF, and World Bank: “A China that turns its back on these institutions [the latter two, especially, under US control] will find itself isolated and defensive, no matter how great its economic and military might.”

Clark in proof of his scholarly respectability does, as I noted, have qualifications of sorts to his analysis. On the right of intervention: “While Americans should hope that China embraces democracy and human rights in the long term, in the short run, we must accept that China has a right to its own system of government and its own standards for political legitimacy and social justice.” This is dangerous ground for a committed imperialist, and so we see now a tightrope act implying that he has kept his balance: “We must help China see a distinction between its principle of ‘noninterference in internal matters of other states’ and respect for basic human rights and dignity.” This is followed by his admission which he places in parentheses: “(For our part, we must also demonstrate our own acceptance of the responsibilities of global leadership by, for example, joining the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.)” A damning indictment for the creator of a global architecture of social justice!

But for one point, we can leave Clark on that note, in recognition that a refusal to join the International Criminal Court not merely shows disdain and contempt for the rule of law, that for which America charges China, but also denies jurisdiction for the arraignment and prosecution of US real and potential war crimes. The further point concerns the subtitle for his article, “To Manage China, Fix America First,” to which he gives scant attention, except to register national pride: “Our natural resources, the rule of law, our entrepreneurial culture, and our vast head start in higher education and science are strong factors in our favor.” Where the “fix” comes in, if any is needed, is this: “If we are to retain our global leadership, and be a constructive, countervailing force as China rises, America needs a long-term strategic vision of our own: a strong, growing economy built on a foundation of energy independence; a vibrant, effective democracy; assertive, patient diplomacy backed by supportive allies; and a military capable of standing toe to toe with China in a crisis.” Given that, then America can lead China out of the darkness into the light of a US-centered world order. “Perhaps then,” he closes, “China’s leaders will feel secure enough to grant real democracy to its people. But it will be a long journey.” One, however, that will not alter the balance and structure of world power.

OCTOBER 17, 2014

### **Ebola Containment?**

The American value system embodies an individualist, self-indulgent, for-profit (above all else) mindset and corresponding institutionalized practice that makes the national response to the Ebola virus not only problematic but inherently inadequate if not also destructive. Societal mobilization for any worthy end cuts across the structural-ideological grain. Witness the feckless “battle” against climate change or efforts to secure adequate, effective gun control—just two obvious problems that COULD be managed if the will was there and the democratization of the power system, absolutely essential to any far-reaching progressive social change, followed.

Not likely, not at all. America is mired down in its own hegemonic cesspool, making any constructive solution to social problems, much less, a transformative awakening which might break the dependence on war, intervention, corporate aggrandizement, hierarchical class and racial arrangements, out of the question. The reason: whether problem-solving to address fundamentals, like a vital social safety net and conquering poverty, or internal transformation, to seek peace and social justice, works against the *raison d'être* of American society—keeping profits up and protest (should it finally break surface, given the evident provocation) down. Which is harder to tolerate, democracy or Ebola, is difficult to answer; I'm betting on democracy as the fate worse than death.

The two are interrelated, the absence of democracy promoting the flourishing of Ebola, because in the structure and practice of American medicine (itself a microcosm of the US corporate order, capitalism in white gown and surgical gloves, to convey the idea of service to the community), profit trumps care and all else besides, from hospital operation/administration to pharmaceutical manufacture/marketing to the ancillary health industry preying on people's needs and insecurities. Think Ibsen's "Enemy of the People," and the poisoned public baths, and you have America 2014 in a nutshell. Silence, deniability, whatever it takes to keep the wheels turning, and at this moment, no doubt, some of our compatriots are thinking ahead about how to make a fast buck on the disease. Others, and this does not require speculation, are already seizing the opportunity to drastically cut or eliminate CDC as an entering wedge for the wholesale repudiation of the PUBLIC realm as such.

Ironically, Ebola could be the Trojan horse for stripping capitalism bare of any protective mechanisms and measures put in place since the New Deal. As a start, blame the messenger for the disease—in this case, Dr. Thomas Frieden, who, from his record as Health Commissioner of New York City, on smoking and obesity, before ascending to director of CDC, appears on the level and hard-working—as a way of directing attention from the grossness of the overall system, which I would maintain, must include its military and foreign policy dimensions. Too many balls being juggled in the air, most of which are judged more important than the health and well-being of the American public.

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Kevin Sack's New York Times article, "Downfall for Hospital Where the Virus Spread," (Oct. 16), makes several points about the failure of Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital to incorporate safe procedures in its treatment of the disease. That such procedures weren't followed shows already deeper structural and systemic flaws. Even if the CDC were not a patsy for American business (let the jury be out on that question, for now), as is every other agency in the regulatory firmament, it nonetheless has been rendered largely powerless in relation to the comparable state bodies, needing their permission to intervene and do its work. Here, though, it has obviously done too little, too late. Sack points out, "it was two days after the Ebola victim [Thomas Duncan] was admitted before personnel began wearing biohazard suits."

Presby, as the hospital is known in Dallas, cannot be wholly blamed, because infectious-disease control has been notoriously lax nationwide (one of the three top causes of death among in-patients), which puts the ball back in CDC's court for not drawing up better protocols and, under penalty of prosecution, demanding their enforcement. Presby was a no-man's land, hospital and federal agency each blaming the other, rather than admit both were complicit in accepting a sweetheart arrangement that satisfied minimum standards while not rocking the boat of private

profit. Sack, in masterful understatement: “If the hospital has served as a canary in a coal mine for the country’s Ebola response, the results have not inspired confidence.”

The poor nurses, in the absence of rigorous CDC guidelines, “donned three or four layers of protective equipment and closed openings with tape in the belief that it would afford greater safety,” in those first days of Duncan’s hospitalization, when in reality, as Frieden notes, “by putting on more layers of gloves or other protective clothing, it becomes much harder to put them on, it becomes much harder to take them off, and the risk of contamination during the process of taking these gloves off is much higher.” Fat consolation to nurses Vinson and Pham, who may yet not recover. CDC-Presby now playing catch-up obfuscates the wider pattern of not making seemingly undue demands by government on the client to be regulated, as though regulation in the public interest is itself ideologically a nonstarter as well as the direct encroachment on the profit-margin. One surmises that public hospitals enjoy the same shield of protection, lest the example set there might spill over to the private sector. Better, hands-off until it is crucial—which indeed is now the case, but regulation as an adversarial process still remains a distant vision and one can expect safety protocols to be half-heartedly implemented if the cost is too high.

In emergency situations, events move fast. Successful capitalism is often a function of winning the public-relations battle. Sack writes: “Hospital officials have generally kept their remarks to a minimum [why not, given the conflicting testimony across the board, about Duncan’s release from emergency and being sent home, despite having symptoms?], issuing brief statements and appearing at only a few of the nearly daily news conferences here [Dallas].” Much disinformation, was Duncan asked about his travel history, did a nurse fail to provide the examining physician with the electronic medical records she prepared, etc., had to be covered over, and thus, “the hospital hired Burson-Marsteller, the global public relations firm, to help tell its side.” Quintessential capitalism on the mark.

Capitalism? Again Sack: “Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas opened as a faith-based non-profit in 1966 in what were then sparsely populated northern suburbs. In 1997, Texas Health Resources was formed by merging the hospital with others in Fort Worth and Arlington. The hospital’s most recent tax filings, from 2012, show that it had \$613 million in revenue and \$1.1 billion in net assets. The hospital’s president at the time was paid \$1.1. million.” Were it not for Ebola, one might well want to vacation in Presby, given its “gleaming hallways and teak-paneled waiting rooms,” especially for the satisfaction of being among one’s own kind; for, he continues: “it is the hospital of choice for some of the region’s richest and most prominent residents. The maternity wing is named for Margot Perot, the wife of the technology magnate and former presidential candidate Ross Perot. The board chairwoman at the hospital’s parent company, Texas Health Resources, is Anne T. Bass, the wife of the billionaire investor Robert M. Bass.” (One reason Duncan may have been discharged prematurely from emergency was that he did not have health insurance. Administrators deny this.)

My favorite guide to social analysis, Willie Sutton, of go-where-the-money-is fame, may have had banks in mind, but for present purposes, hospitals (the whole health industry!) will do just as well, thank you. I have in mind, to see the dynamics of government-business relations at work, and hence, why Ebola is ensured easier spread freed from obstacles of effective regulation, one need only look at the statements of Dr. Daniel Varga, “chief medical officer at Texas Health Resources,” who is a master study in evasion. (Sack’s use of the term “Downfall,” in his article, may be a bit precipitate. With THR behind it, Presby will land on its feet—all 900 beds and 1,000 physicians.)

For in response to a question about how, when Duncan had been re-interviewed by the physician 10 minutes after the nurse had noted that the patient had come from West Africa and thought instead he was a local resident, Varga “said he did not know how that had happened,” and then on the offensive: “Let’s be clear. We’re a hospital that serves this community incredibly well, and we have for nearly half a century.”

For more statements (here, congressional testimony in prepared remarks) of Varga , whom we learn is also “a senior executive vice president for the hospital operator,” I turn to John Swaine’s article in *The Guardian*, “Ebola crisis: Texas hospital apologises for failures in handling of first patient,” (Oct. 16). On a certain lack of veracity: “In our effort to communicate to the public quickly and transparently, we inadvertently provided some information that was inaccurate and had to be corrected.” Inadvertence is, I believe, the ace-in-the-hole for explaining away any failure of will in the containment of Ebola. It may also characterize, not dissembling, but simply sloppiness, because allowing public responsibility to trump profits has become inconceivable in America. How Ms. Pham was infected, “we don’t yet know precisely how and when,” which does not stop Varga from passing the buck to CDC: “[she was] using full protective measures under CDC protocols.” To which the head of The National Nurses United union said, “Were protocols breached? The nurses say there were no protocols.” As for Varga’s explanation about Duncan, corporate apology is in order: “Unfortunately, in our initial treatment of Mr. Duncan, despite our best intentions and highly skilled medical team, we made mistakes. We did not correctly diagnose his symptoms as those of Ebola. We are deeply sorry.”

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My New York Times Comment on the Sack article, Oct. 16, follows:

Presby is a stark example of an America floundering in its seeming abundance. It will be the fall-guy for a wider failing system, in which damage control—calling in a famous p.r. firm—substitutes for frankness and competence. Everyone is scurrying around, applying band-aids where in fact fundamental correctives affecting attitudes as well as, if not more than, procedures, is required.

If an Ebola pandemic should be realized, business-as-usual will no doubt trump an adequate response. Why? Because America is too busy asserting its POWER in the world to respond effectively at home. Expect finger-pointing of a partisan nature before we’re done here, the same twisted logic that gives us intervention, drone assassination, and deregulation (the last-named germane to the present case).

Self-indulgence, me-me-me, will make sane health protocols hard to follow, much less formulate and enforce. My heart goes out to the young nurses; their inadequate preparation was not their fault, but the institutional failure of a system which eschews the very notion of public responsibility.

It’s too late to wring hands or look for scapegoats. Can America rise to the occasion? Doubtful, so long as the prevailing mindset is world hegemonic leadership, no questions asked. Not Presby, but America, is a broken system when it comes to national and global emergencies. E.g., climate change can be viewed as a protracted Ebola—DENIABILITY conquers all.

OCTOBER 20, 2014

## **Nadir of American Liberalism**

And we thought the cold-blooded planning and execution of armed drone assassination vitiated any claim to moral character, a POTUS swaggering around on Air Force One methodically using drones and air power to destroy civilian targets and, as in the recent attacks on UN schools/shelters in Gaza, countenance—if not encourage—the same among friends and allies (Israel), now it is revealed by Charlie Savage of the New York Times, in an article, “Obama Could Reaffirm a Bush-Era Reading of a Treaty on Torture,” (Oct. 19), that our Nobelist Warrior is exquisitely parsing international treaties to allow for US TORTURE abroad, so long as not on the Homeland. Whether the program of torture or the rationale for its authorization is the greater Evil I leave to the professional philosophers to determine. But from here, America’s vanguard role, already the purveyor of global counterrevolution by all means possible, in this latest chapter of structural-political sadism, smells to high heavens. (In an adjoining Times column, the administration is counting on blacks to see it through in the coming senatorial election—manipulation and cynicism which merit protest in the streets, rather than admiration and acquiescence. We might toss in organized labor as well, and whatever remnants of so-called progressivism unable to see through Obama’s and the Democrats’ over-the-wall Reaction.)

Torture is torture; no pick-and-choose definitions of locale or gradations of suffering can change that. Its practice reveals the soul of a nation, a nation of rampant capitalism, moral indifference to poverty, soaking up the world’s wealth and giving in return: war, intervention, control of international financial-economic institutions to provide one-sided American advantage in commercial-investment penetration to the deprivation of those unable to resist. Why surprise? The policies and actions themselves are a form already of torture, altogether legal and legitimate, backed by overwhelming military force, because US sovereignty has gradually since the end of World War II been redefined as, anything for an absolutist conception of American global hegemony.

Torture is the handmaid of hegemony; America has a systemic craving for both, lest it be forced to live in harmony with other nations possessing different values, histories, patterns of development, many of which having already experienced colonial-imperialist domination and military dictatorships imposed from within and without, and wanting to breathe their own free air and pursue their own aspirations. No go (!), for if that were allowed, where would America be? Torture is the glue to cement a desired relation of superiority and inferiority. To blanch from that is, un-American. Obama is our new scout-master to mark the way.

Savage points out that Obama opposed, when it was revealed in 2005, the Bush administration’s secret interpretation of a “treaty ban on ‘cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’ as not applying to C.I.A. and military prisons overseas,” as violating the UN Convention on Torture. That was then. No longer. The reporter continues: “But the Obama administration has never officially declared its position on the treaty, and now, President Obama’s legal team is debating whether to back away from his earlier view.” Whether Obama has the guts (honesty?) to publicly disavow the Convention, these behind-the-scenes deliberations are, even to be taking place, incriminating evidence of morally vile intent. Savage: “It is considering reaffirming the Bush administration’s position that the treat imposes no legal obligation on the United States to bar cruelty outside its borders, according to officials who discussed the deliberations on the condition of anonymity.” I repeat, to entertain the violation of the Convention is bad enough; not to sack the whole lot of his legal

experts is still worse—his own shining presence in the discussion should make every morally conscious American turn their back on him.

So much water over the dam, it's a little late to come forward. But the clock is ticking: "The administration must decide on its stance on the treaty by next month, when it sends a delegation to Geneva to appear before the Committee Against Torture, a United Nations panel that monitors compliance with the treaty. That presentation will be the first during Mr. Obama's presidency." Here the UN itself appears culpable, as though giving the US a free pass for such a length of time, itself emboldening America to pursue violations until compelled to make account, and even then, in a seemingly routine manner, rather than adversarial process before the International Criminal Court.

Obama had "issued an executive order in 2009 that forbade cruel interrogation anywhere and made it harder for a future administration to return to torture," but Savage should know better than to take this at face-value given the commission of war crimes from the moment Obama took office, John Brennan, among other advisers, standing closely beside him, and an Office of Legal Counsel equally as adept as Bush's to squirm around existing treaties. Policies hang together—not only the continued practice of waterboarding, sleep deprivation, etc., speaking of "cruel interrogation," but the predisposition to a consistent psychology and practice of cruelty, so that drone assassination, saturation bombing, covert operations of regime change, none of which is performed with kid gloves, incorporate the same mental traits as that which is allegedly ruled out by Obama's executive order, makes me skeptical of the veracity in carrying it out. Cruelty is indivisible—getting caught is another matter.

There is some in-house debate going on, State on one side, the military and intelligence communities on the other, but whether the former's urge for treaty compliance is half-hearted, given the Department's leadership since Obama came into office, seems probable. The latter, however, in full battle-dress leave no doubt about favoring treaty violation. The last thing wanted, is that America be held accountable for war crimes (as I read Savage between-the-lines): "But military and intelligence lawyers are said to oppose accepting that the treaty imposes legal obligations on the United States' actions abroad. They say they need more time to study whether it would have operational impacts." Operational impacts? Don't impede US freedom of action against the baddies out there, and yes, a fleeting thought about prospective and real war crimes ( my reading): "They [military and intelligence lawyers] have also raised concerns that current or future wartime detainees abroad might invoke the treaty to sue American officials with claims of torture, although courts have repeatedly thrown out lawsuits brought by detainees held as terrorism suspects." Not only is cruelty indivisible, but institutions are synchronized, the courts and the Executive working together to abrogate the rule of law.

Here we have one of the more sublime distinctions recorded in modern times: Bernadette Meehan, an NSC spokesperson, said Obama's "opposition to torture and cruel interrogation anywhere in the world was clear, separate from the legal question of whether the United Nations treaty applies to American behavior overseas." Not clear enough, when the exception demolishes the principle. Before Harold Koh, State's top lawyer, returned to Yale Law, he called for the repudiation of the Bush interpretation of the torture convention and a related treaty which supposedly "imposed no obligations on American officials abroad." Bluntly in a 90-page memo Koh wrote, "In my legal opinion, it is not legally available to policy makers to claim' that the torture treaty has no application abroad." Translated: Don't torture at home; for the Obama

administration, rejecting Koh (no wonder he left, on such a fundamental point) meant an area of free grace, abroad, to torture, telling the UN that the US “still believed that it [the torture treaty] applied only on domestic soil.” Elsewhere, sky’s the limit.

What’s illuminating here is how much Obama has swept under the rug, i.e., through a continuation of Bush policies. As Savage writes, “The torture treaty debate traces back to the January 2005 [Gonzales confirmation hearings for Attorney General].... He faced questions about torture because the previous year, amid the Abu Ghraib scandal, someone had leaked a Justice Department memo addressed to him that narrowly interpreted a statute banning torture.” The upshot? Gonzales revealed that DOJ lawyers “had concluded that the treaty’s cruelty ban did not protect noncitizens in American custody abroad.” Then when McCain proposed the prohibition everywhere, enacted by Congress, Bush “issued a signing statement claiming that his powers as commander in chief overrode the statute,” to which Obama, now ordering compliance, nonetheless preserved the domestic/foreign distinction and that between citizen and noncitizen.

Abraham Sofaer last week cleared the air for us. A former top State lawyer who negotiated the treaty for Reagan and presented it to the Senate for Bush I, denied the purpose was “to limit the treaty’s geographic applicability.” He said, “We shouldn’t have done it [made torture acceptable abroad]. And we need to send a signal to the world that we mean it, we should not have done this, we misinterpreted the convention. This is a really important worldwide ban that we need to get behind again.” Obama, are you listening? Doubtful.

OCTOBER 22, 2014

### **Proto-Nazism on Exhibition**

Israel’s policies and actions toward the Palestinians has been a principal incitement of international terrorism. To say that, does not excuse the latter, but does help to explain it. Had Israel chosen a different path from its founding (Arno Mayer’s *Ploughshares into Swords* records in detail the events of 1945-48 demonstrating the Zionist paradigm of ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Arab population, with few dissenting voices, such as Martin Buber and Judah Magnes), one can speculate that the historical outcome would have been a different spirit and structure of the Middle East, far more promoting of Jewish security certainly than in the present. The irony of history: authoritarianism feeds upon itself, force against force, hatred fully reciprocated. The original fault lies with a totalitarian Zionism which refused to credit the humanity of those it sought to displace, rather than live peacefully among—hubris hiding behind the fig leaf of providing a refuge for the victims of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the systematic execution voicing World Evil, mercilessly planned and carried out on a hitherto unknown scale of human depravity. Survivors and descendants would bear the scars. Yet rather than engender compassion embracing the whole of humanity and life itself, the reaction was that of vengeance, of seeking power, however ruthless the consequences, as a self-protective shield with the inscription, “Never again”. At first, that seemed natural, and even commanded world respect following World War II. But the psychology of suffering was so intense as though breaking into another realm, what I am calling the introjection of the mentality of the Nazi executioner, perhaps not even realizing it.

How otherwise view the history of modern Israel with respect to its own militarism, cult of superiority, reactionary stance in world politics, discouragement of internal dissent, and, obviously, treatment of the Palestinians, an Occupation not unlike what Europe experienced decades earlier? Humiliation, check-points, bulldozers, terrorist-like arrests in the middle of the night, the ever-present blockade, all-in-all a studied effort at imposing degradation on a people, the better (presumably) to enforce social control.

From IDF shootings of adolescents to the scene in New York, Monday, October 20, at the Metropolitan Opera is a straight-line projection, nominally, to protest the performance of John Adams's "Klinghoffer," but far more, having nothing to do with the opera, rising to the occasion of absolutist self-justification of all Israel has done and everything it stands for. For the most part, world Jewry supports that record and finds only goodness in Israel, making Judaism and Israel indissoluble in meaning and moral value. There I disagree strongly. Israel is not Judaism, and, indeed, is fast becoming a curse on Judaism, by its wanton killings, arrogance, willingness to cause universal calamity to satisfy its policies. Bomb Iran. Bomb Assad. Bomb, bomb, bomb, power stations, water treatment plants, schools, shelters. Invincibility, the national disease. And AIPAC, hosannas to the heavens—American Jewry fearful of its own shadow, not from external forces, but congregational unanimity lest one be declared the Self-Hating Jew.

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Michael Cooper's NYT article, "Protests Greet Met Opera's Premiere of "Klinghoffer,"" (Oct. 21), provides some sense of the scene, not the usual Met opening—tuxedos and gowns, but there the resemblance ends: "[At the opening] men and women in evening attire walked through a maze of police barricades, while protesters shouted 'Shame!' and 'Terror is not art!' One demonstrator held aloft a white handkerchief splattered with red. Others, in wheelchairs [Klinghoffer, the passenger on a cruise ship hijacked by Palestine Liberation Front terrorists, confined to wheelchair and murdered] set up for the occasion, lined Columbus Avenue." Let's stop a moment. Demonstration: as one who has participated in many over the years, and even if I hadn't, I would defend its right to exist and occurrence to the hilt. Objective: one doesn't have to agree with the content and purpose of every exercise of free speech, here, a falsification of the composer's position AND itself an attack on the civil liberties of others, i.e., closing down an opera as well as, in principle, censoring artistic (and all other) expression. Free speech was taking a beating last night (Oct. 20) in the name of free speech. I cannot let the moment pass, and be steamrolled over by what amounts to a hidden or implied argument on behalf of Israel policy and conduct.

Of course, free speech can have an ugly side: Cooper reports that "after months of escalating protest, including threats of opera officials and online harassment of the cast," the opera went on "only a few minutes late." Inside the hall, quite uneventful: "By the time [the] opera ended, with a roar of cheers when Mr. Adams took the stage, there had been two major disruptions: Before the intermission, a man shouted 'The murder of Klinghoffer will never be forgiven' several times before being escorted out, and during the second half, just after the character of Leon Klinghoffer was murdered, a woman cried out a vulgarity and left, accompanied by ushers."

The opera, he writes, "considered a masterpiece by some critics, has long aroused passions," given its subject matter, the murder of a helpless Jewish passenger, but in addition, he continues, "the 1991 opera arrived at the Met at a moment when many Jews are anguished by anti-Semitic



episodes in Europe and reactions to the conflict this summer in Gaza. [See my Comment below.] It also ignited what sounded at times like a revival of the culture wars of the 1990s, in which works of art became fodder for intense political debate.”

In other words, the opera was not allowed to stand on its own; instead, Adams was charged with giving the terrorists a podium. Rudy Giuliani was among the protesters, but, perhaps to his credit, unlike most others, he wanted to register disapproval (calling the work “a distorted view of history”) but not cancel the performance, while Bill de Blasio “defended the Met’s right to perform” the opera, and pointed out how Giuliani, as mayor, in 1999 wanted to stop funding the Brooklyn Museum of Art because of a show he found offensive. De Blasio: “I think the American way is to respect freedom of speech. Simple as that.” There was tight security, uniformed police, “all bags checked,” and at the final dress rehearsal the previous Friday, Peter Gelb, the general manager of the Met, reassured the “performers and musicians... about enhanced security measures.”

The rally’s master of ceremonies (yes, quite organized), Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, said he did not expect the protesters “to react inappropriately,” yet his own remarks were hardly less than accusatory: “But you can’t be responsible when the Metropolitan Opera advocates terrorism and incites violence—you can’t know what will happen.” Incitement by whom? The onus is placed on Gelb: “And anything that happens, that has besmirched this Metropolitan Opera, and besmirched Lincoln Center, is to be laid at the foot of Peter Gelb.” Not to be outdone, Cooper quotes a pediatric nurse who “believed the opera made an excuse for terrorism”—in her words, “By putting this on a stage in the middle of Manhattan, the message is, ‘Go out, murder someone, be a terrorist and we’ll write a play about you.’” The reporter concludes, “The protests were initially led by several smaller Jewish groups and conservative religious organizations. The larger Anti-Defamation League brokered a compromise with the Met... in which plans to show the opera to a wider audience in movie theaters were dropped, but the New York production would otherwise go on. Leaders in the more liberal Reform Judaism movement have condemned the opera, but did not call for its cancellation.”

My New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

Wouldst the protesters show as much concern for the Gazans, men, women, children, murdered by Israel in the bombing and shelling of a densely populated area. Wouldst they show as much concern over the Israeli hooligans who broke up peace demonstrations in Tel Aviv or the Israelis of Siderot gathered on a hillside, sofas and munchies at hand, cheering the explosions on the Gaza side (all of which had been reported in The Times).

Israel’s conduct is creating anti-Semitism in Europe, not the other way around. Israel has been a dead weight on World Jewry by its flagrant violation of the Torah, which commands us (yes, I am proudly Jewish, not, as vipers would have it, a self-hating Jew because I criticize Israel) to respect the stranger and reach out to the poor.

What we saw in New York was proto-Nazism in microcosm—nothing will stop this ferocious campaign of swinging out promiscuously against all who do not follow the strict party line. It had nothing to do with Mr. Klinghoffer’s death, but merely a striking out of supreme self-justification of Israeli policy, no matter what—the “what” being the commission of war crimes, and the corrosion of Judaism itself.

God will get a hand on the situation someday, and punish those who hide behind Adonei to kill and maim for reasons of a vulgarized “Chosen People” doctrine as license to be transmogrified from oppressed to oppressor. The psychodynamics for what has happened is dark, introjection of the mindset of the persecutors.

OCTOBER 24, 2014

### **Nisour Square Revisited**

Because of the jury finding of guilty for four Blackwater contractors responsible for 17 civilian deaths in Nisour Square, Baghdad on September 16, 2007, a window has been opened—never closed in the first place, but now a useful reminder—to the widening concentric circles of private security companies on hire to the US government committing authorized public murder for a handsome fee, the USG standing behind them, fighting an illegal war for purposes of strengthening its geopolitical position in the Middle East, and America’s wider counterrevolutionary posture fighting what now amounts to a desperate rear-guard action to maintain its unilateral dominance of an international system which itself is becoming decentralized with the advent of new power centers including Russia, China, Japan, Latin America, and an awakening Third World.

Nisour Square is revelatory of a dying Empire, America, solipsistic, fear-driven, ideologically rigidified, a military Behemoth yet, given its passion for privatization, insistent on mobilizing private armed force to supplement its troops in prosecuting armed conflict. Supremacy, at the cost of humanity—hence, at all costs. Before commenting on the trial which has just concluded, I’d like to step back, explore in some detail Blackwater, and also point out through a comparable example, the Haditha killings in Iraq nearly two years before, that the line between private and official/public has broken down, America’s so-called military contractors (the euphemism for mercenaries) and regular service personnel are in the field of operations practically indistinguishable. Blackwater is America, Haditha and Nisour Square, along with our other killing fields and atrocities, emblematic of a nationhood tarnished by aggression, imperialism, and capitalism (as manifested through the extremes of corporatism, environmental degradation, and the widening of class differences).

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Let’s begin with Blackwater, creator of a surprisingly extensive private army wholly antithetical to the principles of democracy, an inner core of fascistic intent that by its very existence denies to the US its democratic status. Whether it intimidates the government so that it acts with impunity (while enjoying lush contracts) or reflects such a close ideological meeting of minds, is a moot question; nevertheless, closeness there is, the pool of warriors from one—CIA, SEALs, etc.—transfers effortlessly to the other. From Blackwater, to Xe Services, to Academi, and now, Constellis Holdings, an American Success Story of unusual magnitude in which a ceaseless stream of militarism for hire finds a ready market for hegemonic growth: killing on a contractual basis, in which the Obama administration has given it \$250M for services rendered the CIA and another \$92M for the State Department. Security guards are worth their weight in gold because some “services” are better not disclosed.

The name-changes represent, not ducking adverse publicity for murders committed, although probably that, too, but because the security industry is “hot” in investors’ eyes and the object of

acquisitions, the smooth melding of patriotism and profit. Blackwater was established by Erik Prince, who created in NE North Carolina a 7,000 acre private training facility replete with every sort of range, an artificial lake, all to simulate battle conditions, special ops missions, etc. This blossomed into Blackwater Security Co. in 2002 and the proliferation of special divisions, nine in number, including Blackwater Vehicles and, for its first Iraq contract, a Personal Security Detachment (with two helicopters) to protect Paul Bremer. In toto BSC made over \$1B in government contracts. We're not speaking of a few Brinks trucks, but a private army in the country's midst. It also jumped into Katrina's aftermath to protect government facilities and private parties to the tune of \$240T/day. Then came the contract for diplomatic security in Iraq (1,000+ contractors), and we see executives like Cofer Black, out of CIA, and Robert Richer, ditto, as perfect examples of the revolving door.

By 2007, we have Blackwater Worldwide, 2009, Xe Services, 2010, Academi, 2014, Constellis Holdings, at each step enlarging its "products," gaining more influential supporters combined with more ambitious projects (such as United States Training Center for weapons training and tactics). There is maritime force protection training, dog training, expanded security consulting—as one goes through the list, it is as though an inner army outside of public view and not accountable to the public. Special assignments such as working with CIA to track down bin Laden in Afghanistan cemented working relations with USG. An airline, Presidential Airways, called for a base in Melbourne, Florida.

I believe the picture is clear—Blackwater in its various guises was not a cast-off orphan, but at the heart of American intervention activities, such as Nisour Square. Since it executed official policy, rather than being a rogue outfit, USG stood behind it, to the extent that even the present trial and verdict appears suspect, to be undone when no-one is looking or, in light of the enormity of the offense, no more than necessary damage control. In addition, the stage was set for Nisour Square by what American forces did in Haditha in which 24 Iraqi civilians were killed by US Marines, Nov. 19, 2005. Like Nisour, Hadithra had no explicit justification from victims' actions; rather, shooting pell-mell, here, unarmed men, women, children, the elderly, shot at close range—with justice meted out American military style. By June 17, 2008, cases against six Marines dropped, a seventh found not guilty. The exception, in the Article 32 hearing, Frank Wuterich, was charged with negligent homicide in the deaths of two women and five children, murder charges being dropped, as were those of assault and manslaughter, leaving one count of negligent dereliction of duty. He received a reduction in rank and pay cut, no jail time.

This was customary, yes, par for the course, Marines in the area (Al Anbar province) routinely raiding houses committing multiple executions, the rule of thumb (as in Nisour Square) being, don't get too close to military (there, Blackwater) convoys and traffic, people stopped, ordered out of their cars, shot, or in house-to-house searches for I.E.D.'s, 19 killed, three adjacent houses, grenades thrown in followed by semi-automatic fire. One nine-year-old: "I couldn't see their faces very well—only their guns sticking in to the doorway. I watched them shoot my grandfather, first in the chest and then in the head. Then they killed my granny." Several investigations were launched to the, now, myriad incidents, with the same old, same old: lawless law on a rampage.

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That was Iraq; no wonder the arrogance and sense of impunity among our Breakwater warriors when they plowed through a busy intersection, machine guns blazing, merely to clear the way, Embassy folks late for an appointment cross-town with AID officials. Uniforms, civvies, what's the difference, the line erased when the status-of-forces agreement ensured the avoidance of local trial and punishment. Victors are victors and have to behave as such, lest Occupation prove a failure. What happened, as also with My Lai in another theater, is that murder is inscribed in the DNA of Intervention, massacre the unit of coinage for ensuring social control. So, Sept. 16, 2007, Blackwater security forces enter the Square, kill 14, injure 20 more, and seven years later, four are convicted, one for murder, three for manslaughter and firearms charges. Even the FBI investigation, one of five, found that 14 of 17 were shot without cause. The intricacies of judicial denial are unfathomable, that is, if one still believes in justice; e.g., one district judge dismissed charges because other guards' testimony was given in exchange for immunity and therefore (presumably) inadmissible. The merry-go-round of delays, botched government procedures, whether deliberate or not, witnesses brought over from Iraq under FBI supervision (which I wrote about in an earlier CP article), consuming SEVEN YEARS, and then, finally, justice be done, which, given the enormity of the crimes, suggests its discouragement, denial, disparagement. Ah, that poor woman and her son, driving in a Kia toward the convoy, and blasted out of existence, the signal for promiscuous firing in all directions. One excuse put forward: the civilians were mistaken for insurgents.

As the UN stated in Oct. 2007, private contractors performed military duties, calling their use a "new form of mercenary duty" in flagrant violation of international law. However, not surprisingly, the US is not a signatory to the 1989 UN Mercenary Convention banning use of mercenaries. (As I recently wrote, the US also is not a signatory to the Torture Convention—the pen runs dry at odd moments.) To the locals, Blackwater guards were the real terrorists, one telling AP Television News, "We see the security firms... doing whatever they want in the streets. They beat citizens and scorn them." And Obama lavishes multimillion dollar contracts on them and Hillary, as Secretary of State, hires them to protect the Baghdad Embassy, largest in the world, a superb honor guard for her putative inauguration in 2016, dead bodies, like so many roses, strewing the landscape.

Let's come up to the present. First, Matt Apuzzo's close, often excellent, New York Times' coverage of the trial and verdict, culminating in his article, "Blackwater Guards Found Guilty in 2007 Iraq Killings," (Oct. 22), in which he maintains the convictions "represented a legal and diplomatic victory" for USG that as a result "urged Iraqis to put their faith in the American court system." Right and wrong: a victory in that any convictions were found, wrong, in that the government is using the verdict as testimony of the health of the rule of law in America, opportunistic usage, for what still remains a long-drawn out appeals process and punishment hardly fitting the seriousness of the crimes committed. Also, the status of private mercenary armies and their collaboration with the CIA have not changed, including the status-of-forces agreements insulting to and binding the hands of the so-called "host" countries on matters of legal accountability for crimes committed by US personnel, armed forces and private.

The charge of murder, against Nicholas Slatten, was brought only because the statute of limitations had run out on the other charges (there is none on murder). He "faces possible life in prison," the others, "convicted of voluntary manslaughter and using a machine gun to carry out a violent crime," carried fewer years. Apuzzo notes, "While the company's security guards were involved in scores of shootings in Iraq, it was the 2007 incident in Nisour Square that helped

cement Blackwater's image as a company that operated with impunity because of its lucrative contracts with the American government." Of the Iraqi witnesses who traveled to America to testify, "an Iraqi traffic officer described watching a woman cradle her dead son's head on her shoulder, shortly before her own death." Other testimony was equally heartbreaking, and even those "inside the Blackwater convoy described their former colleagues as firing recklessly on innocent people." The defense would have none of it, brazenly defiant to the end and gearing up for appeal.

Dan Roberts, writing in *The Guardian*, Oct. 23, covers some of the ground and quotes Federal prosecutor Anthony Asuncion's moving closing statement: "These men took something that did not belong to them: the lives of 14 human beings. They were turned into bloody bullet-ridden corpses at the hands of these men.... There was not a single dead insurgent on the scene. None of these people were armed." Then his voice shaking he was asked to repeat a key line the court stenographer had missed: "'[The witness] opened the door and his brains fell out at his feet,' Asuncion shouted the second time."

Spencer Hsu and colleagues on *The Washington Post*, Oct. 22, treat similar ground, reminding us that the trial had lasted eleven weeks, "jurors reject[ing] the guards' claims that they were acting in self-defense and were the target of incoming AK-47 fire." (Elsewhere we learn that Blackwater cartridge shells were picked up from the scene to avoid incriminating evidence.) The reporters note: "The contractor shootings and the U.S. government's refusal to allow the men to be tried in Iraq sent relations between the two countries into a crisis, and the Blackwater name became shorthand for unaccountable U.S. power."

Few have had the stomach to take on the mercenary industry: "In Congress, lawmakers denounced the Blackwater shootings as recently as this summer, but legislation that would provide clearer jurisdiction to prosecute criminal wrongdoing overseas by private contractors has languished for years." Leahy, they write, has been the exception. Chair of Senate Judiciary, and "author of the proposed change," he "applauded the verdict Wednesday [Oct. 22], but added, 'It should not have taken this long for justice to be served.... Ensuring that our government has the ability to hold government contractors accountable should be a bipartisan issue, and I hope senators of both parties will work together to pass this important reform.'" Dream on, for not even his Democratic party has shown the necessary will, and may in any case applaud this phenomenon.

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Also writing in *The Post*, Terrence McCoy, in his article, "Why the Blackwater convictions won't slow America's 'shadow armies,'" (Oct. 23), uncorks a real specter, the rise of private armies like Blackwater increasingly to perform military functions in maintaining world leadership. The concept, the "shadow army," should be enough to make us catch our breath, a privatized armed force waving the twin banners of privatization and hegemony, in fact and intent, places lack of unaccountability and of governmental transparency on the track to incipient fascism (if not there already). He starts with one absent from the courtroom—and, of course, from arraignment—who was "a man synonymous with the United States's infatuation with contractors. He is Erik Prince—billionaire, former Navy Seal, ex-CIA spy—the founder of Blackwater."

Personalities do count; Blackwater is not an inexorable creation of capitalism-militarism (although ably suited to both). McCoy writes: "Prince is a man accustomed to drama. Numerous agencies have interrogated him. Members of Congress and reporters have hurled accusations

against his company.... He has been called a ‘war profiteer,’ a ‘mercenary’ and a ‘right-wing crusader.’ He has sold his company and started a new one under a different name.” This time, presumably though, he is discomfited: “But he has never had to deal with something like this [the four guilty verdicts]. Still, McCoy exaggerates, for Prince, beyond war profiteer, etc., (all of which are true), is a superb entrepreneur, private armies the growth industry of the future, the trial no more than a blip on his radar screen. ISIS awaits, as does lush contracts, private armies to the rescue!

Excellent analysis: “[Prince] has never shed the ethos of the military contractor. Even now he thinks the United States should start enlisting contractors in the fight against the Islamic State.” Prince wrote in a blog post this month, “If the Administration cannot rally the political nerve or funding to send adequate active duty ground forces to answer the call, let the private sector finish the job.” Capitalism is not for the squeamish or soft-of-heart. And Prince knows whereof he speaks, or rather, diagnoses the situation perfectly. As noted, there has been no legislation, despite the unlawful behavior, to curb contractors or push for “industry reform,” and, perhaps more basic, “with an army staffed by volunteers, contract firms such as Blackwater are an ingrained aspect of the American warrior class—whether there’s peace or not.”

How can Obama, in fighting ISIS, avoid the wider deployment of contractors, given that air strikes do not appear effective and deploying US troops seems presently unacceptable? Voila, the “shadow army.” One who had done “contract stints in Somalia and Afghanistan, told the Daily Beast: “Iraq this time around is not going to be as big as it was before. That said, this new war will present an opportunity for the companies that have a resident train and advising capability to contribute to this new effort.” The view of another military contractor in Iraq: “I can tell you the contractor-expat community is abuzz thinking this will lead to more work.” Economic growth through military conquest, now, if not fully before, is coming into its own. That is why I see Nisour Square as being so significant, stripping the lid from the, if you will, dialectically intertwined militarization/privatization of the American political economy in the direction of recognizable fascism.

My New York Times Comment on the Apuzzo article, Oct. 23, follows:

Nisour Square stands out vividly in my mind, the gratuitous spraying of an intersection so that Blackwater could go through. The verdict is laughable given the enormity of the offense. More, America refuses to face the fact of hired mercenaries licensed to kill AND exempt, by forced treaty, from local criminal jurisdiction (Hillary’s insistence on diplomatic immunity).

“Reckless” is inadequate: the record is one of systematic killing with IMPUNITY. So now, sentences which will no doubt be commuted, USG throwing a protective shield around those it hires to do its dirty work. Has The Times the editorial courage to look at the whole phenomenon of private mercenaries—and call for their removal?

Blackwater is inseparable from intervention, drone assassination, paramilitary missions of regime change. America never looked worse.

OCTOBER 27, 2014

## **One-Sided Cold War**

America's shrill, expanding demonization of Putin, Obama now equating Russia and Ebola as paired dangers in the modern world, follows from its ideological-structural matrix of decline as the unilateral military-economic leader of the international order. Decaying societies don't fare well in global history, especially when the inner rot of the political culture erodes the foundations of reason, moral principles, and humaneness, precisely where America now finds itself. The inner rot is not merely capitalism per se, although that gets it off to a good start because in practice characterized by petrification in the face of challenge and dissenting opinion, but capitalism as it presently exists in America, where the fear of social transformation (i.e., anything which jeopardizes the power of ruling groups, questions Authority, or otherwise destabilizes class relations) has yielded systemic militarization to keep capitalism on pace and secure. And even the militarization of capitalism, generally adequate to normalizing conditions of fascism, emergent or full-blown, in America has a particularity distinguishing the society from all others: its fusion of Exceptionalism and counterrevolution (each needed to sustain the other) dressed up in the language of liberal or humanitarian intervention in world affairs.

Marx is somehow surpassed by present-day Imperialistic reality, so that not even the structuring of the political economy along monopolistic lines, nor the central importance of the commodity in shaping social relations and reaching down to the epistemological level in governing human thought (for both, vitiating authenticity at its social and individual roots, the replacement of use value by exchange value), does not go quite far enough in understanding how capitalism has evolved in America to what it now has become: a menace to human dignity at home and to the striving for universal peace abroad. It is the latter, however, which interests me here. Demonizing Putin is thus symptomatic, not of an assessment of the world situation, but of the dimly-perceived yet nonetheless real awareness that societal decline, unless there is a fundamental course corrective (which seems unlikely), has set in and appears to be irreversible. Hence, the dangers inhering in slowly-building desperation.

Putin, I believe, sees this. His address, to the Valdai International Discussion Club, XI session, in Sochi, attended by 108 scholars and political analysts from 25 countries (including 62 foreign participants), had as its theme this year, The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules. His address, which takes up that theme, is to me of epochal significance, standing on a plane with the Marshall Plan speech and the announcement of the Truman Doctrine since World War II, and substantively, better crafted and offering far deeper insights into the organization of the international system as well as Russia's place within it. Full disclosure: I am impressed. This does not make me a stooge of Soviet Communism, however much this reification of Cold War propaganda still exists. Having been called a self-hating Jew because of my last CP article, on demonstrations over the Met production of "Klinghoffer," I am now reconciled to being called a self-hating American because of my favorable analysis of Putin's address contained herein.

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It is easy to appear contrarian when one sees the way The New York Times and The Washington Post covered the address, scare headlines and all, truly disgraceful coverage enough to raise anyone's ire. But I prefer the positive side, Putin's analysis as both able and persuasive. Yet brief

notice of the papers' coverage is in order, not to throw brickbats at prestigious sources, but to expose the alarming failure of journalistic integrity where US hegemonic purpose is involved. Neil MacFarquhar's Times article, "Putin Accuses U.S. of Backing 'Neo-Fascists' and 'Islamic Radicals,'" (Oct. 25), has a blistering, emotion-laden opening sentence: "President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Friday unleashed perhaps his strongest diatribe against the United States yet, using an international meeting of Russia experts to sell Moscow's view that American meddling has sparked most of the world's recent crises, including those in Ukraine and the Middle East." We'll see: "diatribe"? "sell Moscow's view"? MacFarquhar got this right: "The goal of the United States, he said, was to try to create a unipolar world in which American interests went unchallenged." Who in Washington would disagree, except for one thing—the US had already created a unipolar world, a position of dominance it is now losing, both points of which Putin fully elaborates.

Proudly, in this very short article, the reporter devotes space, not to text, but to the burgeoning conflict: "Since Russia granted asylum to Edward J. Snowden, the American intelligence contractor, and the crisis in Ukraine, President Obama has increased pressure on the Kremlin, lumping Russia together with Ebola and terrorism as key threats to world stability. Washington has pushed its Western allies for a series of economic sanctions against Russia, resulting in cuts to financing from Western banks and halted oil exploration projects." MacFarquhar then recited the propagandistic litany: "Russia is often accused of provoking the crisis in Ukraine by annexing Crimea, and prolonging the agony in Syria by helping to crush a popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, Moscow's last major Arab ally." Then he planted the (unattributed) charge: "Some analysts have suggested that Mr. Putin seeks to restore the lost power and influence of the Soviet Union, or even the Russian Empire, in a bid to prolong his own rule." (Tell me, Vladimir, when did you stop beating your wife?)

The Post's Karoun Demirjian and Michael Birnbaum's article, "Russia's Putin blames U.S. for destabilizing world order," (Oct. 25), succeeds little better—if at all. Their opening sentence: "Making clear that the Kremlin has no intention of backing down from the worst Russia-Western crisis since the Cold War, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States on Friday of trying to 'reshape the whole world' for its benefit, in a fiery speech that was one of the most anti-American of his 15 years as Russia's paramount leader." Fiery? We'll see; Harvard doctorates have been awarded for less scholarly treatises than this. The same litany of wrongdoing, passing lightly over the coup: "In nationally broadcast remarks that lasted nearly three hours [presumably a sign of demagoguery and reawakening the image of Fidel in the same light], Putin gave no hint of concessions to Western consternation over Russia's role in Ukraine, where Putin first pressured former president Viktor Yanukovich over his plans to sign a European friendly trade deal, annexed the Crimean Peninsula after pro-European protesters forced Yanukovych's ouster and then helped fuel a pro-Russian rebellion in eastern Ukraine." All points Putin responds to himself. Then the cherry atop the frothing: "Although there was little new substance in the angry address, it was a bitter distillation of Putin's anti-American rhetoric at an annual forum originally intended to put a Western-friendly spin on Russia's image."

These national papers are thought to be dependable sources of the news. Did the reporters even study the text of the address? If Putin is seen as belligerent, that lies in the eye of the beholder. Better than Foreign Affairs 101, we have here a graduate seminar in International Relations directed



by one who has blended realpolitik with a surprising undercurrent of moral values, both of which take account of historical development and reveal a skeptical view of ideology.

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The seminal phrase of the address, which occurs near the end, is “a new version of interdependence,” itself sending chills down my spine because it expresses the vision of a non-hegemonic world, balance, harmony, regional clusters, eschewal of autarky, the triumph of dialogue over force. If Washington has had anything better to offer since World War II, I have yet to hear it. We have then a major departure from Soviet history and ideology, in which Putin stands Stalin’s “Socialism in One Country”-doctrine on its head, even to the extent (corresponding to recent structural changes in Russia) of qualifying socialism through active cooperation with the international business community, as if to assert a mixed economic order on a global scale. This is a basic, but not the only, aspect of “a new version of interdependence,” the wider implication of his address being, If the world is to avoid impending conflagration, cooler heads must prevail. Also, by his calculation, the West, the US, the EU, these are no longer central organizing principles of world development (Russia’s increasing involvement with the BRICS countries, to which he traveled to Brazil this past July to the Summit Meeting in Fortaleza to deliver an important speech, and will host the next annual meeting, having fueled this conviction).

Let’s see, pace The Times and The Post, what Putin really said, the American media by and large ignoring the address altogether. No Iron Curtain descended on Sochi; following his greetings to the final plenary meeting, he said: “It was mentioned already that the club has new co-organisers this year. They include Russian non-governmental organizations, expert groups and leading universities. The idea was also raised of broadening the discussions to include not just issues related to Russia itself but also global politics and the economy.” Putin continued: “I hope that these changes in organisation and content will bolster the club’s influence as a leading discussion and expert forum. At the same time, I hope the ‘Valdai spirit’ will remain—this free and open atmosphere and chance to express all manner of very different and frank opinions.” Remember the reporters’ preceding caricature—wouldst Obama had the intelligence and wit to say the following, rather than all obfuscation and scripted platitude: “Let me say in this respect that I will also not let you down and will speak directly and frankly. Some of what I say might seem a bit too harsh, but if we do not speak directly and honestly about what we really think, then there is no point in even meeting in this way.” He has it right: “It would be better in that case just to keep to diplomatic get-togethers, where no one says anything of real sense and, recalling the words of one famous diplomat, you realize that diplomats have tongues SO AS NOT TO SPEAK THE TRUTH.” (My caps.)

This is hardly vented spleen: “We get together for other reasons. We get together so as to talk frankly with each other. We need to be direct and blunt today [here one senses Putin is speaking to the world, not to this meeting alone, underscoring the seriousness of the situation] not so as to trade barbs, but so as to attempt to get to the bottom of what is actually happening in the world, try to understand why the world is becoming less safe and more unpredictable, and why THE RISKS ARE INCREASING EVERYWHERE AROUND US.” (My caps.) He is sounding the tocsin of a normless world, perhaps political-ideological nihilism (or as I recently wrote in these pages, the prevalence in the West, under American leadership, of Thanatos) when he states, “Today’s discussion took place under the theme: New Rules or a Game without Rules. I think that this formula accurately describes the historic turning point we have reached today and the choice we all

face.” This is not resurgent Cold-War simplification, but a seriousness of concern all but absent from our think tanks, pundits, official Washington itself: “There is nothing new of course in the idea that the world is changing very fast. I know this is something you have spoken about at the discussions today. It is certainly hard not to notice the dramatic transformation in global politics and the economy, public life, and in industry, information and social technologies.” Yes, he is sniping at the US, the last-mentioned a veiled reference (which he later makes explicit) to massive surveillance now taking place in America. But, a diatribe?

He asks pardon for “repeating what some of the discussion’s participants have already said,” which is unavoidable in light of the “detailed discussions,” yet, he goes on, “I will set out my point of view. It will coincide with other participants’ views on some points and differ on others.” What gives dignity to the address from the outset is the recognition that the world is staring into the abyss. Here is Putin with context: “As we analyse today’s situation, let us not forget history’s lessons. First of all, changes in the world order—and what we are seeing today are events on this scale—have usually been accompanied by if not global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive local-level conflicts. Second, global politics is above all about economic leadership, issues of war and peace, and the humanitarian dimension, including human rights.”

In this vein, he points to fast-becoming societal breakdown global in its proportions (hardly a theme to enlist chauvinistic cheers back home, and rather a sobering note): “The world is full of contradictions today. We need to be frank in asking each other if we have a reliable safety net in place. Sadly, there is no guarantee and no certainty that the current system of global and regional security is able to protect us from upheavals. This system has become seriously weakened, fragmented and deformed. The international and regional political, economic, and cultural cooperation organisations are also going through difficult times.” What saves him from a Cassandra-like role in world politics, still less that of the ubiquitous despoiler and aggressor, is the frankness of the diagnosis and willingness to do something about it. The status quo is plainly unacceptable; societal-wide reconstruction is just as plainly necessary.

Putin returns to post-World War II arrangements as a base-point, reasonably workable mechanism for ensuring world order because, beyond “the balance of power and the rights of the victor countries,” there was sufficient mutual respect so that leaders “did not try to put the squeeze on others [here he may be smarting under the current sanctions regime], but attempted to reach agreements.” Too idyllic by far, which he seems to recognize: “The main thing is that this system needs to develop, and despite its various shortcomings, needs to at least be capable of keeping the world’s current problems within certain limits and regulating the intensity of the natural competition between countries.” Developing the system further, is the point of the address—not this or that political economy, but the world system, the institutionalization of harmonious relations between nations.

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When Putin does criticize the US, it is not aimless hysterics. Patiently he dissects the element of breakdown growing out of, and I think inherent in, the Cold War, a setting that could not possibly last. Thus, he completes the thought about a system needing to develop: “It is my conviction that we could not take this mechanism of checks and balances that we built over the last decades, sometimes with such effort and difficulty, and simply tear it apart without building anything in its

place. Otherwise we would be left with no instruments other than brute force.” In logic and practice, there has to be a next step: “What we needed to do was to carry out a rational reconstruction and adapt it [to] the new realities in the system of international relations.” Note where his thoughts on reconstruction lie, on the international system, which he believes is decisive, and for him, accomplishable when intervention in a country’s internal structure and system of governance is prevented. (Perhaps democratization thereby is allowed to flounder, but that is a matter for nations to determine for themselves, while intervention, as on the grounds of liberal humanitarianism, is especially productive of conflict and war—AND disguises the power position and hegemonic intent of the invading force. China, along with Russia, is firm on this proposition, although in the wider picture seen here, Li might not be prepared to follow Putin beyond an early point.)

Having come this far in his discussion, Putin now turns to the US and the Cold War: “But the United States, having declared itself the winner of the Cold War, saw no need for this [rational reconstruction]. Instead of establishing a new balance of power, essential for maintaining order and stability, they took steps that threw the system into sharp and deep imbalance.” (Lest balance-of-power politics sounds like Metternich-Kissinger-Stalin, the whole thrust of Putin’s address is to redefine it—the new version of interdependence, shorn of war-producing ideology and conditions.) This prompted further reflection on the Cold War, focused on the advantage sought by the US: “The Cold War ended. But it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting existing rules or creating new rules or standards. This created the impression that the so-called ‘victors’ in the Cold War had decided to pressure events and reshape the world out of their own needs and interests. [The words are carefully chosen; he has not exempted the Soviet Union, as one of the victors, from pursuing its own self-interest, which of course it did.] If the existing system of international relations, international law and the checks and balances in place got in the way of these aims, this system was declared worthless, outdated and in need of immediate destruction.”

Putin, however, apparently draws back. He later has harsh words for Khrushchev, but the thrust of his analysis is that Russia simply was not in a league with America in prosecuting global ambitions, the dynamics of the interplay between them, both for responsibility in heightening the Cold War and spinning out from there to reshaping the international system, seems from this corner, nurtured on works beginning with D.F. Fleming, then to William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, and a host of others, to bear him out. I find Putin’s account of the post-Cold War years compelling, but the very fact that he has felt the need to move ahead, taking Russia into a new realm, not THAT of Empire and the Restoration of Catherine the Great, speaks volumes about his own criticism of Soviet history and conduct. Else why the emphasis on interdependence?! His one bit of levity: “Pardon the analogy, but this is the way nouveaux riches behave when they suddenly end up with a great fortune, in this case, in the shape of world leadership and domination. Instead of managing their wealth wisely, for their own benefit too of course, I think they have committed many follies.” He is referring, unmistakably, to the US.

Now the gloves come off, but the cap and gown remain. Criticism need not be a sign of irrationality, only so when ruling groups declare it so, as with the reception to Putin’s speech quoted above, indeed, and when whom- and whatever stand in the way of American hegemony. Putin turns, then, to the lead-up to his concerted critique of America’s exercise of unilateralism in the international system (somewhat of a misnomer itself when centered on the dominance of one

country). He states: “We have entered a period of differing interpretations and deliberate silences in world politics [that, a touch of the poet, in a supposed political harangue]. International law has been forced to retreat over and over by the onslaught of LEGAL NIHILISM. Objectivity and justice have been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Arbitrary interpretations and biased assessments have replaced legal norms. At the same time, total control of the global mass media has made it possible when desired to portray white as black and black as white.” (My caps.) This is penetrating stuff, not name-calling as charged in the headlines, but a significant dimension of alienation at the heart of the rule of law and questioning its existence and efficacy.

Finally, he cuts to the chase, the ideological generalization from particular to universal, from American nation to rightful/exclusive world leadership, a projection of fetishistic Exceptionalism (my idea, not his) founded on domination, its necessary means of achievement: “In a situation where you had domination by one country and its allies, or its satellites rather, the search for global solutions often turned into an attempt to impose their own universal recipes. This group’s ambition grew so big that they started presenting the policies they put together in their corridors of power as the view of the entire international community. But this is not the case.” Precisely the argument for the decentralization of world power, what I have been terming a multipolar framework, and, though Russia is strong enough to stand on its own feet, vis-à-vis America, its inclusion in BRICS bears out the intent of global restructuring and end to US dominance as integral to Putin’s thinking. This would not mean resumption of Cold War hostilities, already present in any case, but the frank acknowledgment that America must be compelled to find its place in the Family of Nations. US criticism of Putin reduces to, an unwillingness to give up its place of world domination, which, like it or not, it has already lost, the BRICS one harbinger of the future, China and Russia, another, as Washington ups the ante through greater militarism, sanctions, interventions, assassinations—all the traffic will bear, including the detection of New Enemies to ensure a steady diet of the foregoing.

With this, we see a glimpse of the reasoning behind upholding national sovereignty; for otherwise, nations become swallowed in the maw of Behemoth, sovereignty, then, a defense against absorption into the power orbit of America: “The very notion of ‘national sovereignty’ became a relative value for most countries. In essence, what was being proposed was the formula: the greater the loyalty towards the world’s sole power centre, the greater this or that ruling regime’s legitimacy.” Russia was not that “world’s sole power centre,” nor does Putin harbor such aspirations. He has already said a mouthful, but—and the transcript bears this out—he was prepared for utter openness in the discussion of his views: “We will have a free discussion afterwards and I will be happy to answer your questions and would also like to use my right to ask you questions. Let someone try to disprove the arguments that I just set out during the upcoming discussion.” Just imagine Obama saying that.

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Putin is not through; it only gets better. When he sketches the penalties of nonconformance to the power system as it presently exists, one sees a further sharpening of focus on America: “The measures taken against those who refuse to submit are well-known and have been tried and tested many times. They include use of force, economic and propaganda pressure, meddling in domestic affairs, and appeals to a kind of ‘supra-legal’ legitimacy when they need to justify illegal intervention in this or that conflict or toppling inconvenient regimes.” The whole panorama of imperialism rolls by, from a supra-legal standard of Exceptionalism to concrete interventions

running a wide gamut of nations (to which he comes to presently), but the referent is clear: “It is not for nothing that ‘big brother’ is spending billions of dollars on keeping the whole world, including its own closest allies, under surveillance.” The last refers presumably to the eavesdropping on Merkel and others.

Putin is asking, how long can this assault on the international system continue, here for the moment playing devil’s advocate for the US: “Let’s ask ourselves, how comfortable are we with this, how safe are we, how happy living in this world, and how fair and rational has it become? Maybe, we have no real reasons to worry, argue and ask awkward questions? Maybe the United States’ exceptional position and the way they are carrying out their leadership really is a blessing for us all, and their meddling in events all around the world is bringing peace, prosperity, progress, growth and democracy, and we should maybe just relax and enjoy it all?” His answer: “Let me say that this is not the case, **ABSOLUTELY NOT THE CASE.**” (My caps.) Ironically, one who is customarily linked to totalitarianism refers to “big brother” and complains about the endangerment to civil liberties.

If the foregoing be an attack, what follows is discerning political science, popularized as “blowback,” but in fact a recognition of the reverse-dynamics of unilateralism (aka, absolute power): “A unilateral diktat and imposing one’s models produces the opposite result. Instead of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos, and instead of democracy there is support for a very dubious public ranging from open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals.” That is the context from which the named-groups jump out of one of the aforementioned headlines—not irresponsible finger-pointing, but part of a complex analysis. He continues: “Why do they support such people? They do this because they decide to use them as instruments along the way in achieving their goals but then burn their fingers and run.” Yes, blowback, but, politically-ideologically, almost a compulsive-obsessive disorder: “I never cease to be amazed by the way that our partners just keeping stepping on the same rake, as we say here in Russia, that is to say, make the same mistake over and over.”

The insight is important. Not just, as I think Chalmers Johnson may have seen it, poor judgment, opportunism, wrongful policies on an ad hoc basis, and instead, inhering in the history, culture, politics, economics of a nation, and structurally coalesced around a value system of superiority and integrated through expansion and militarism. Not blowback in the singular and particular, but an integral policy disposition toward imperialism and war—and with that, he gets down to cases: “They once sponsored Islamic extremist movements to fight the Soviet Union. Those groups got their battle experience in Afghanistan and later gave birth to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The West if not supported, at least closed its eyes, and, I would say, gave information, political and financial support to internationalist terrorists’ invasion of Russia (we have not forgotten this) and the Central Asian region’s countries.” Putin’s remark in parentheses alerts us to what is seldom mentioned: not only his and Russia’s steadfast resistance to terrorism, but the extent to which, using the Taliban and mujahedeen, this was avowedly conceived in the light of anticommunism, America’s thumb on which to suck to ward off all threats real and imagined. For some time I have tried to see counterterrorism as a surrogate for anticommunism; here Putin helps me to make the connection.

Demonization is in the air—yet, in fairness, how account, after reference to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, for the sentences to follow? “Only after horrific terrorist attacks were committed on US soil itself,” he states, “did the United States wake up to the common threat of terrorism. Let me remind

you that we were the first country to support the American people back then, the first to react as friends and partners to the terrible tragedy of September 11.” Two points: first, the West (particularly America) helped to create the terrorist groups it now seeks mightily to suppress; and second, there is Obama’s indictment of Russia/Putin as, along with Ebola, a present threat to the US.

Putin is more than miffed. There before the US on the terrorism issue, he sees America using it to increase international tensions (directed to Russia) while pursuing further interventions (in its name), all to what end? Given overtures to cooperate, itself a mechanism for easing tensions, he finds only a blank wall: “During my conversations with American and European leaders, I always spoke of the need to fight terrorism together, as a CHALLENGE ON A GLOBAL SCALE. We cannot resign ourselves to and accept this threat, cannot cut it into separate pieces using double standards. Our partners expressed agreement, but a little time passed and we ended up back where we started.” [My caps.] To me, it is inescapable what is happening. America does not want to solve the problem of terrorism. Its utility lies in keeping the nation on total alert, military alert, which also sustains the policies and spirit of confrontation with Russia, and, more recently, China. The Cold War is alive and well—thank you, ISIS.

Putin practically says as much. After noting the passage of time, he states: “First there was the military operation in Iraq, then in Libya, which got pushed to the brink of falling apart. Why was Libya pushed into this situation? [Good question] Today it is a country in danger of breaking apart and has become a training ground for terrorists.” Putin is not infallible, obviously. He next praises Sisi for keeping order in Egypt and criticizes the direct arming of Syrian rebels against Assad (a more complicated case; Assad is no Sisi, and the rebels, hardly a democratic social force, whilst Morsi and the Brotherhood gave more promise in Egypt). Nevertheless, Putin values order, where the choice is that or terrorism. It wasn’t only that the US and its allies “started directly financing and arming rebels and allowing them to fill their ranks with mercenaries from various countries,” but this opened the larger can of worms, the financing of terrorism in general, extending its reach, power, and sophistication: “Let me ask where do these rebels get their money, arms and military specialists? Where does all this come from? How did the notorious ISIL manage to become such a powerful group, essentially a real armed force?” Good questions, yet—possibly for that reason—he remains out in the cold.

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There is so much more of value to analyze in the address, but for reasons of space limitations and trying the reader’s patience I shall confine myself to several broader points, taking them seriatim so as to keep its structure and flavor intact. The departure point is Putin’s stunning critique of a single-power (i.e., US) framework of global dominance, stunning in that it raises fundamental issues of political theory relating to the international system, the nature of sovereignty, and indirectly, moral obligation. Thus he turns next to the self-defeating consequences of war, intervention, conquest, as though the nation embarked on a Sisyphean struggle (my point): “We sometimes get the impression that our colleagues and friends are constantly fighting the consequences of their own policies, throw all their effort into addressing the risks they themselves have created, and pay an ever-greater price.” It’s no cinch to remain top-dog, though the US has not realized this. The Lord Acton aphorism about absolute power corrupting absolutely comes to mind, or as Putin states the proposition: “[T]his period of unipolar domination has convincingly demonstrated that having only

one power centre does not make global processes more manageable. On the contrary, this kind of unstable construction has shown its inability to fight the real threats such as regional conflicts, terrorism, drug trafficking, religious fanaticism, chauvinism and neo-Nazism.” Perhaps a more explicit reference to America (which I would score it a failing grade on the preceding list): “At the same time, it [the unipolar world] has opened the road wide for inflated national pride, manipulating public opinion and letting the strong bully and suppress the weak.”

He is not through, the epigrammatic sentence to follow deserving pride of place on the proscenium of the US Capitol as a daily reminder of the social misery this nation has created at home and abroad: “Essentially, the unipolar world is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries.” It is also perhaps too expensive to maintain, in its own right and to support a healthy domestic society: “The unipolar world turned out too uncomfortable, heavy and unmanageable a burden even for the self-proclaimed leader.” Then the brilliant shocker. Putin is saying the US is seeking the structural-ideological reproduction of the previous historical period, in other words, a return to the Cold War in its pristine clarity, a bipolar world, America and Russia, where America can thrive and still do as it pleases, without the burden of unipolar leadership weighing it down. Putin wants to move forward, the US, to move backward, to the social and psychological security of always having an Enemy through which to then know itself.

Let’s take this in steps, beginning from “our self-proclaimed leader.” Putin (I see him cap-and-gown, not his usual blue business suit) observes: “This is why we see attempts at this new historic stage to recreate a semblance of a QUASI-BIPOLAR WORLD as a convenient model for perpetuating American leadership.” (My caps.) Precisely because of this new historic stage, America proceeds backward, not forward, unable to accept social change, unwilling to experience democratization, whether of the world structure or its own. The hunker-down mentality. Putin regrettably doesn’t carry through from his own analysis (but who in America would listen anyway?), but the implications are fairly straightforward, as now, when he comes to America’s need always for an Enemy. In that convenient model it offers the world, “[i]t does not matter who takes the place at the centre of evil in American propaganda, the USSR’s old place as the main adversary. It could be Iran, as a country seeking to acquire nuclear technology, China, as the world’s biggest economy, or Russia, as a nuclear superpower.” It doesn’t matter; what matters is the Enemy provides the opportunity and pretext for enlarging the nation’s leadership role in the world, along with increasing its military/nuclear capacity.

Putin continues—create fragmentation for its own sake, the better to maintain power AND encourage an aimlessness and loss of purpose or meaning in international affairs (i.e., for the other guy): “Today, we are seeing new efforts to fragment the world, draw new dividing lines, put together coalitions not built for something but directed against someone, anyone, create the image of an enemy as was the case during the Cold War years, and obtain the right to leadership, or diktat if you wish.” Oh, that right to leadership, which capitalizes on the projection of Evil in the world, and the demand, given the savior warding off danger, of outright submission, a game of psychodynamics America knows well (although others on the Continent wrote the book): “The situation was presented this way during the Cold War. We all understand this and know this. The United States always told its allies: ‘We have a common enemy, a terrible foe, the centre of evil, and we are defending you, our allies, from this foe, and so we have the right to order you around, force you to sacrifice your political and economic interests and pay your share of the costs for this

collective defence, but we will be the ones in charge of it all of course.” Amen. Hallelujah. All we need now is the ghost of Frederick Taylor to enlist in the cause—and Putin, with a telling phrase, seems to recognize that, too: “In short, we see today attempts in a new and changing world to reproduce the familiar models of GLOBAL MANAGEMENT, and all this so as to guarantee their [the US’] exceptional position and reap political and economic dividends.” (My caps.) He concludes the thought on a sober yet sensible note: “But these attempts are increasingly divorced from reality and are in contradiction with the world’s diversity. Steps of this kind inevitably create confrontation and countermeasures and have the opposite effect to the hoped-for goals.”

The address contains so much more, and I regret the need to pull away. But there is one thing to add, the context for the phrase, “a new version of interdependence.” The ground has not been adequately prepared from the subsequent content of the address, for a seamless entry to it, but enough of Putin’s thinking would, I believe, make it self-explanatory. He states: “In light of the fundamental changes in the international environment, the increase in uncontrollability and various threats, we need a new global consensus of responsible forces. It’s not about some local deals or a division of spheres of influence in the spirit of classic diplomacy, or somebody’s complete global domination. I think that we need a new version of interdependence. We should not be afraid of it. On the contrary, this is a good instrument for harmonizing positions.” Will there be any takers? Last we saw the US would not even sign the Convention on Torture.

OCTOBER 29, 2014

### **Ebola Quarantine Policy as Libertarianism**

Privatization of the mind: in the face of a viral disease with the potential for (i.e., capable of) spreading to pandemic proportions, anything that smacks of the communal good trumping individuals’ presumed rights is anathema, lest it Collectivize America and raise the Specter of Russia and China. Cuomo and Christie, to their everlasting shame, backed down from common-sense policies of health management in addressing contagious disease. America is choking in its rigidified IDEOLOGICAL fear, here, a ramped up anticommunism evolved into counterterrorism, acutely alert to, and necessarily screening out, anything that opposes and refers back ultimately to what we might call Market Fundamentalism, an inadequate designation for the pathologies of unrestrained capitalism. A mouthful? Sure. But how else sound the tocsin of capitulation to a political leadership, viz., the Obama administration, so profoundly corrupt in wanting approval that it uses the flimsy pretext of, “We don’t want to discourage health workers from going to Africa to treat Ebola patients,” as cover for: We are the prideful, Exceptional nation and people who represent an uncontaminated capitalism in a hostile world against forces (Obama personally linked Ebola, terrorism, and Russia as threats to the Homeland—a xenophobic/ethnocentric term if ever there was one) whose sole purpose is to do us in.

This hodge-podge of planned confusion emanating from the White House and forcing the Cuomo-Christie retreat (singly and together, never much for articulating resistance to American Corporatism, i.e., fascism) places the people’s health hostage to an absolutist Individualism that plays well from Wall Street to Peoria while defying the essence of quarantine policy throughout the ages: Safeguarding the public’s health is NOT a trespass on civil liberties! Even ACLU falls into line, fearful of the avalanche of right-wing thinking in America which, as in the case of the nurse



temporarily confined to an isolation setting in New Jersey, questions any restraint on human conduct as the most heinous of constitutional crimes. Good. Fine. Those of us—and I admit to being practically alone on this—who see America as the principal threat to world peace, as swimming in a sea of War Crimes, as going through the widest disparity of income and wealth in American history (The Times reported recently on a \$90M condo in NYC), believe the nation properly deserves its fate wherein irredeemable stubbornness and arrogance on behalf of the Property Right has sunk political consciousness to rock-bottom self-indulgence, ready to fight the world over its arrogation of unilateral global hegemony.

I commented yesterday on Putin's wise address to the Valdai Discussion Club, and was glad to see that CP published its text for all to judge; his emphasis therein on a "new version of interdependence," not with Ebola in mind, but the larger breakdown of World Civilization, nevertheless implicitly sets priorities right in a common struggle against the fallacies of a unipolar world, and by extension, in microcosm, the politicized, irresponsible conduct/dogma of individualistic grandeur incapable of protecting the rights of the community. Communal rights writ large make up an harmonious world, something America regards as anathema. Perhaps Ebola will somehow be a blessing in disguise (were it not for the myriad innocent victims!) teaching us that antecedent principles of human welfare must trump the visceral opportunism we are seeing today. By all means, from governors to CDC officials to, now, the media, all of whom have bought into the Free-Enterprise racket, retreat in the face of White House pressure is understandable. (Why not, you are all wallowing in the same ideological manure pile?) Meanwhile, Obama and Company are dancing to the music of the capitalistic spheres and have left public-health considerations far behind.

Ebola might well be contained under the present regimen, but the regimen—voluntary, non-institutional quarantine—may be as deadly as the virus itself, or at least inextricably tied to it, from the standpoint of all sorts of diseases, medical and political, coming down the pike. In times of plague, whether potential or real, just as in times of privatization run amuck, strewing bodies around in another form of misery, the defense of the community, at whatever level, from local to global, takes precedence in any sort of moral order that values human life above mere wealth and power. But of course, when wealth and power become equated with moral order, what I am saying is pure nonsense. Looking around now, the overwhelming consensus in America is that it is. Putin's "new version of interdependence" will find little favor here.

My New York Times Comment on Matt Flegenheimer, et. al., "Under Pressure, Cuomo Says Ebola Quarantines Can Be Spent at Home," (Oct. 27), follows:

Obama's opposition to the mandatory quarantine smacks of political correctness, a play to the Libertarian crowd. Of course, sound science MAY be in his favor; yet Dr. Spencer's case suggests otherwise, particularly, even with the best of intentions, one cannot fully know about the incubation stage until too late.

Why the sudden concern about mandatory quarantine when Obama personally authorizes drone assassination on a frequent basis, or other signs of Executive indifference to civil liberties? Sheer hypocrisy, if not worse—the deliberate effort to appear humane to the world as a p.r. stunt, meanwhile potentially putting the American public at risk.

More phony politicization of important matters at the hands of this administration. Should outbreaks occur, Obama should be handed his walking papers—a crass politician indifferent to everything but his own public image.

OCTOBER 31, 2014

### **Soft-Core Fascism**

America is in trouble. Its people have never been more supine in the face of, complicit in, indifferent to, the criminality of its policies, both foreign and domestic, yet this does not sufficiently seem to reassure its ruling groups, albeit, not a unified ruling class, but reasonably cohesive as drawn from financial elites, upper industrial and business circles, selected political and military officials, and any of the superrich I may have slighted. There is surprising unanimity at the top, corresponding in degree to the acquiescent in the middle and bottom ranks of society. Of course, radicals don't like to hear that, but looking at the dimensions of social control, hidden as well as overt, in America, and from that plateau, the commission of war crimes on a steady basis in foreign affairs, one perhaps reluctantly has to admit truth will out: the fascistization of US society is moving right along, if not indeed nearing completion. Yet not to worry, it's hardly noticeable, what I refer to as its soft-core expression, generally and more effectively under liberal auspices.

You don't need the more familiar concentration camp and gas chamber to subjugate a people. Heavy-handed intrusion into their lives combined with their own self-policing of word and deed as the desired consequence, usually is enough. For the object is the security/maintenance and expansion of monopoly capitalism free from blemish (i.e., internal criticism and foreign obstacles). There are infinite gradations of terrorization, the thin line from soft-core to hard-core manifestations of fascism often being hard to determine, especially since they in fact form a continuum and feed on each other. History, culture, and political institutions are often complicating factors, although at bottom terror, real or disguised, is held to be essential as the instrument of choice in reducing people into submission to Authority. Order is the operative term in characterizing fascist structure, ideology, and mental-set.

Recognize anything familiar, yet? If, as in America, society is doing its job, the answer should be, No—the point of submission is to wrap it in the flag of DEMOCRACY. Lead the people to diversions, whether football, the stock market, fashion and sexual gratification, but not critical thinking, not the exposure of hegemonic planning and practice, the absence of political choice, the never-ceasing processes of wealth concentration and industrial-financial-commercial consolidation. Keep the people off-balance; purge their ranks of dissent. Starting to seem more familiar, fascism as a somewhat painless process (the Nazis had the motto, “Strength through Joy”) provided you have a scapegoat to unify the people?

Fascism requires an Enemy, even if one has to be manufactured, is fictional, does not exist, or, through government policy and activity, in this case, eavesdropping, broadly conceived to include all modes of breaking down the walls and protections of privacy, is simply implied. For why else would government go to so much trouble if there wasn't an enemy somewhere out there? Confirmation of subversion because of the effort to track it—hence government can do no wrong. Fascism is not a function of technological advancement, the latter merely a facilitator through more advanced means of creating and disseminating propaganda—as well as the instruments of less

gentle social control. With this brief sketch, let's turn to two items coming to my attention in the last 24 hours, what I might term, archetypal straws in the wind illustrative of a fundamental structural-ideological pattern: one, collective in reach, the other, applying to an individual (which may apply to many more, but who are less resourceful in the discovery of the intrusion on privacy).

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We all know, or thought we did, the scope, prevalence, and depth of USG surveillance on the American public. This is the Age of Snowden, by all rights our national hero, who fleshed out the NSA program of massive surveillance. Too, we know the infamous character of the FISA Court, which has never met a request for eavesdropping it didn't honor. NSA/FISA alone, were there nothing more, would confirm America, and especially Obama, as the enemy of Civil Liberties, having achieved nonpareil domestic and foreign spying the envy of every dystopian writer. But important though it be, we have focused so much attention on NSA as to think, okay, we have a step up on addressing the official internal espionage on all Americans, when actually the problem is larger—perhaps the CIA and FBI, but also the less well-known Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), finally, largely because of the NSA disclosures, then coming into view, but SURPRISE, at least to me, we now have the United States Postal Service performing yeoman service in spying on Americans. Things are getting too close for comfort, nothing more apple pie than USPS with its quaint little right-hand drive, white-painted modified go-carts and the smiling men and women who sell us stamps and deliver our mail. Nothing more American than that, as hard to imagine as though the girl scouts were complicit in selling poisoned cookies (fortunately not the case).

Postal clerks and mailpersons, all is forgiven—policy is set considerably higher up. Who knew what goes on in the bowels of a massive organization (to wit, the Postal Inspection Service, and the Mail Isolation Control and Tracking Program)? New York Times reporter Ron Nixon's article, "Report Reveals Wider Tracking of Mail in U.S.," (Oct. 27), confirms the existence of a new luminary on the government spying front, or rather one previously undetected, until last June, when Politico first published the contents of the USPS audit containing valuable information. Nixon begins: "In a rare public accounting of its mass surveillance program, the United States Postal Service reported that it approved nearly 50,000 requests last year from law enforcement agencies and its own internal inspection unit to secretly monitor the mail of Americans for use in criminal and national security investigations." That takes in a wide field. "The number of requests," he points out, "shows that the surveillance program is more extensive than previously disclosed and that oversight protecting Americans from potential abuses is lax."

The program as revealed by the audit (NYT gained access through the Freedom of Information Act and also conducted interviews) shows that it "has played an important role in the nation's vast surveillance effort" since 9/11, that, nevertheless, "in many cases the Postal Service approved requests to monitor an individual's mail without adequately describing the reason or having proper written authorization." I call this the FISA-effect. There is also sloppiness (probably bringing in more suspects): "In addition to raising privacy concerns, the audit questioned the efficiency and accuracy of the Postal Service in handling the requests.... [C]omputer errors caused the same tracking number to be assigned to different surveillance requests." Transparency in government? "The audit was posted in May without public announcement on the website of the Postal Service inspector general and got almost no attention."

The sanctity of the mail-delivery process is so comforting, as e.g.: “At the request of state or federal law enforcement agencies or the Postal Inspection Service, postal workers record names, return addresses and other information from the outside of letters and packages before they are delivered to a person’s home,” which “provides a wealth of information”—and the caveat in parentheses, “(Opening the mail requires a warrant),” as though having come this far, scrupulosity now reigns supreme. In tabulating the number of requests from 2001-2012, The Times found that the average (8,000) was well below that of 2013 (50,000). I invite one’s own reading of the data, yet surely Obama’s prosecutorial zeal should be factored in. My favorite example of USPS surveillance, however, is “a program called Mail Imaging, in which its computers photograph the exterior of every piece of paper mail sent in the United States.” The presumed purpose is “to process the mail,” although as “a surveillance system” it is not without merit. Safeguards? “Defense lawyers say the secrecy concerning the surveillance makes it hard to track abuses in the program because most people are not aware they are being monitored.”

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Civil liberties, anyone? Massive surveillance, in the last analysis, affects individuals, not an amorphous mass, in this case, a former CBS news correspondent who apparently was coming too close for comfort in her reporting on Benghazi. (I assume, judging from the tactics employed and expertise involved, that NSA was involved. Apologies if I’m mistaken.) Here Washington Post reporter Erik Wemple’s article, “Sharyl Attkisson’s computer intrusions: ‘Worse than anything Nixon ever did,’” (Oct. 27), conveys what I wanted to say above, namely, that Obama, in the violation of civil liberties, is in a class of his own. Nixon, even Joe McCarthy, essentially were novices in this all-court (i.e., many-sided) press. Disclosure: I haven’t read her book yet, which was just released—superbly titled, “Stonewalled: My Fight for Truth Against the Forces of Obstruction, Intimidation, and Harassment in Obama’s Washington”—but there is sufficient material for necessary background on the problem in Wemple’s article. Rather than treat with ages’-old violations of civil liberties, here is Obama unadorned, which must include DOJ and his national-security team.

“The intrusions into her... computers constitute the narrative spine” of the book, which “starts with not really a word, but a sound: ‘Reeeeeeeeeeee.’” Wemple continues: “That’s the noise that Attkisson’s Apple computer was making at 3:14 one morning. A Toshiba laptop computer issued by CBS News did the same thing a day earlier, around 4 a.m. All this goes down in October 2012, right in the midst of the Benghazi story.” The names of friends and technical advisers are fictionalized. Jeff: “I’ve been reading your reports online about Benghazi. It’s pretty incredible. Keep at it. But you’d better watch out.” Things happen. Wemple: “On one level, the book is a reminder of all the ways people can mess with you.” Then Attkisson: “[B]y November 2012, there are so many disruptions on my home phone line, I often can’t use it. I call home from my mobile phone and it rings on my end, but not at the house.... My television is misbehaving [etc],” everything, computers, TVs, phones, “all use Verizon’s FiOS service,” and Jeff finds at the back of her house a “stray cable” attached to the FiOS box, which “could be used to download data.”

Then her computer, inspected by a person she calls “Number One,” who is “described as a confidential source inside the government,” and, shades of Deep Throat, together they meet at a McDonald’s, check out the surroundings, and talk. He: “First just let me say again I’m shocked. Flabbergasted. All of us are. This is outrageous. Worse than anything Nixon ever did. I wouldn’t

have believed something like this could happen in the United States of America.” He is an expert, but one obviously sheltered. Then down to cases: the breaches in her computer come from a “sophisticated entity that used commercial, nonattributable spyware that’s proprietary to a government agency: either the CIA, FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, or the National Security Agency (NSA).” One intrusion, she learns from him, “was launched from the WiFi at a Ritz Carlton Hotel,” and, she comments, the “intruders discovered my Skype account handle, stole the password, activated the audio, and made heavy use of it, presumably as a listening tool.”

Nonattributable spyware. Why my detailed account here, especially as a technologically challenged one with less computer skill and understanding than a nine-year-old? Others may follow easily, but the point is prevalence and thoroughness of the spying, yes, the absolutist invasion of privacy which should nail Obama as anything other than a war-possessed charlatan, contemptuous of civil liberties, to the wall. “Number One” then finds “three classified documents deep inside her operating system, such that she’d never know they were even there.” Her reaction, hardly paranoid: “Why? To frame me?” It only gets worse.

CBS engages an independent computer analyst Attkisson calls “Jerry Patel,” who “finds a massive amount of suspicious activity in the computer, including the removal of all kinds of messages.” Patel she describes as “breathing heavily. It alarms me because it alarms him and he’s not easily alarmed.... [Then he states] “In my professional opinion, someone has accessed this box.... I see evidence that shows a deliberate and skilled attempt to clean the log files of activity.” Most interesting, Patel declares that “intrusions of this caliber... are ‘far beyond the abilities of even the best nongovernmental hackers.’”

Patel tells CBS that “only a few entities possess these skills. One of them is the U.S. government.” Then in September 2013, “as White House officials pressure CBS News executives over Attkisson’s Benghazi reporting, something goes haywire with her computer.” She writes, “Suddenly data in my computer file begins wiping at hyperspeed before my very eyes. Deleted line by line in a split second: it’s gone, gone, gone.” Finally, she hires another security specialist, and in her words, “While a great deal of data has been expertly wiped in an attempt to cover-up the deed, Don is able to find remnants of what was once there. There’s key evidence of a government computer connection to my computer. A sort of backdoor link that leads to an ISP address for a government computer that can’t be accessed by the general public on the Web. It’s an undeniable link to the U.S. government.” Soft-core fascism: you don’t need the concentration camp when other avenues of social control are open to, and have been opened by, the government. It’s gone, gone, gone, not only a computer file but perhaps in time, freedom itself.

NOVEMBER 3, 2014

### **A Snake Cannot Change Its Markings**

Or if you prefer (to be tactful), a leopard cannot change its spots—but either way, skipping to the chase, the Obama administration, signals coming out of possible staff changes, it wouldn’t matter, the nature of the beast being the narrowed bounds of counterrevolution, global hegemony, surveillance, a clogged stream of war, intervention, deregulation, assassination, within whose confines America is pushing the envelope of 20th century fascism dressed as 21st century liberal humanitarianism. Markings/spots don’t wash off. The beast, the Democratic party, has inscribed in

its DNA from Truman through Obama a core of antiradicalism happily transmuted into fervid anticommunism then, not skipping a beat, because the same essential political-ideological formation holds, counterterrorism, and now exemplar of democracy conferring world leadership. With baseness of this character, who needs Republicans? The country's Capitalist Soul can be fully entrusted to Democrats, even more so, because the level of sophistication creating deception and false consciousness is even greater. And radicalism? Where did that disappear to? Swept by the same stream into the river Styx.

Mark Landler's New York Times article, "Obama Could Replace Aides Bruised by a Cascade of Crises," (Oct. 30), conjures up dedicated officials worn out from fighting the good fight (never fully identified by either him or them, except as perhaps against a generalized, amorphous terrorism) on track, yet forced by world circumstances to address simultaneous multiple crises none of our own making. Landler puts well the sense of Innocence backed against the wall (no doubt the prevalent feeling—who us? did we do anything wrong?) possibly necessitating staff changes, not because of false policy decisions made having war-crimes implications, but simply, exhaustion in the service of the country. He writes: "At a time when the Obama administration is lurching from crisis to crisis—a looming Cold War in Europe, a brutal Islamic caliphate in the Middle East and a deadly epidemic in West Africa—it is not surprising that long-term strategy would take a back seat. But it raises inevitable questions about the ability of the president and his hard-pressed national security team to manage and somehow get ahead of the daily onslaught of events."

I beg to differ. "Hard-pressed," perhaps; meetings for planning drone assassination, covert operations, identifying and magnifying an Enemy (to justify the military implementation of US global management, financial-commercial penetration on an expanding basis, and assuring social docility at home through stoking an appetite for foreign conquest), can be exhaustive work. The Obama engine of Imperialism never shuts off. From the administration's standpoint, the good thing, however, is that the supply of certifiable planners-ideologues never shuts off—as though a mold has been created, at Harvard, think tanks, or the swamplands of liberal/Centrist politicians never long out of public service. Credentials are easy to obtain: passing the f-scale (fascism) of the Adorno, et. al., Authoritarian Personality study, CIA-Pentagon experience, and proven hard-line attitudes and performance in previous administrations. The supply of those eager to prove their mettle by going up against Putin and Li is seemingly inexhaustible.

But "lurching," emphatically not; a consistency of aggressive design (our concern here is foreign policy, but the consistency in domestic policy interrelated with but distinct from the former should be noted), the rhetorical liberalization of imperialism, and ingrained convictions of inevitable Great-Powers conflict which places preemptive nuclear war tucked away on the near-margins of political discourse yet ready for use at all times, all signify the defining contours, indeed, the entrance gate and ticket of admission to Team Obama. Peaceniks are not wanted. Stay out. The reason this is not noticed is the unexceptional character of the foreign-policy paradigm. It's been around a long time. Obama vibrates at one with the American people on the rawness, assumptions, and underlying edge favoring global hegemony (his low poll ratings partly a function of not sizing up the man properly, which is to say, his profoundly militaristic view of the world and comfort with the military and intelligence communities). What appears, then, as lurching can be attributed to the one factor a fascist-inclined mind-set (here, toss in the whole team, from Rice and Power to Brennan, Dempsey, right—and I mean right—down the line to agency heads, speechwriters, public intellectuals, etc.)

never seems to reckon with: the consequences of policy, i.e., commonly known as blowback, but in addition, the temerity of those wronged and violated to want to fight back.

Bullies cannot last forever. Times change, yet Obama and his foreign-policy crew plod on, circa 1950s, in the best Cold War tradition, even including massive surveillance on the home front going Joe McCarthy one better. Obama's contribution to world peace is and has been already the militarization of American Consciousness, a specific gnawing away at civil liberties, rule of law, international treaties and protocols (the US has yet to ratify the Convention on Torture), everyday modes of obligation and accommodation which, fully honored and supported, question and defy the logic of the militarized Fortress the nation has become. Yet instead of calling Obama to account, fellow Democrats, naturally, as expected (given the party's lackluster record and ideological collapse into Reaction), rush to his side and lamely call for replacements for the "battle-tested but exhausted White House loyalists and cabinet members." If so replaced, who will notice, the screening process guaranteed to provide continuity. Sen. Blumenthal of Connecticut, on Senate Armed Services, greases the track: "There is an inflection point in every presidency, and this certainly is a logical one, if the president feels he might be better served by some replacements on his team." Maybe talk is premature, especially given Obama's dependence on his inner circle. Together, they have the ultimate excuse, a complicated world the team has been exemplary in addressing. Give Susan Rice the last word: "We're managing a multiring event, and I think reasonably well. I would say very well, if I were not trying to be a little bit studied. We've got a lot of balls in the air; and frankly, they're still in the air."

My New York Times Comment on the Landler article, same date, follows:

Emphasis on multiple problems and staff burnout is a lame excuse for what really matters: policy substance. Every foreign-policy crisis listed has little to do with poor planning and/or slow execution, but with the fundamental international posture of the US, a Behemoth seeking to maintain unilateral world dominance in what is now—which America cannot prevent—a multipolar world tired of America's military-financial-commercial-political control.

Obama is the worst POTUS since World War II, ignorant of sound principles, vain, opportunistic, attempting to orchestrate a full-throated confrontation with both Russia and China, and meanwhile practicing illegal interventions, drone assassinations, a monolithic armed presence everywhere. His advisers are drawn from central casting on a Strangelove set, exuding hatred for any and all who oppose US global hegemony.

This is not a record of ineptitude, as some seem to think, but rock-bottom counterrevolution in order to keep the US on top of the power pyramid. And the nation faults him—for not being more aggressive, more belligerent, as though government and people were in a mad race to see who is deadliest of them all. Obama is perfect for where America is, pushing toward a soft-core fascism composed of economic consolidation, mass surveillance, and over-the-top militarism. Obama deserves better of the American people because he is executing their own Thanatos-like inner rot of moral-social values.

NOVEMBER 4, 2014

## **“American Footprint” in Iraq**

The US doesn't want to leave; its godlike liberal humanitarian mission to bring freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people, marked indelibly on the American conscience, is too noble to be abandoned by any extrinsic considerations, viz., illegal war, defiant intervention, rape, shock-and-awe battleground rules, drone assassination, in sum, those messy things accompanying righteous struggle that only picky minds find objectionable. American principle is being tested today—either keep at it (“it” conveniently never defined in terms of the complex of geopolitical strategy to achieve global hegemony, supplemented by an entrenched militarism structuring the American mind, and the habitual needs for capitalist expansion only seemingly satisfied through a devouring war economy) or admit to cowardice and bring on systemic collapse because not sufficiently aggressive in and toward the world. God loves unilateralism. The Devil sent ISIS to test America's moral fiber.

So there we are, back at the old stand. Moral vigor requires, create your Enemy in order to vanquish it. Details not wanted, whether torture of the recalcitrant, fabrication of a counterterrorism ideology for justifying wider international goals (OIL between the toes of the footprint, as well as solidifying a wall of geographic-political containment to check presumed Russian-Chinese expansion into the region while at the same time shoring up Israel), even perhaps attempting to reverse history, reactivating colonialism, now that Britain and France are out of the way, by readapting it to what Gallagher and Robinson (in a landmark article) once termed, “noncolonial imperialism,” the advantages of colonialism in terms of commercial-financial penetration while avoiding administrative “burdens” and costs—except of course that military domination is itself a whopping cost and sign of the original article.

Military planning appears focused on ISIS. Poor Gen. Dempsey, as though he didn't have his hands full enough already with events outside the region, not least, going head-to-head with Russia and China as part of Obama's all-out pressure to isolate them on the perfidious road to hoped-for dismemberment (or somehow making each tributary to the US). It is amazing how much official attention, echoed by a more-than-willing media, is being devoted to ISIS, the Enemy du jour vital to keeping the whole edifice of monopoly capitalism in full running gear, now including massive surveillance on the home front. Let's look closer at that preparation with respect to and concentration on ISIS.

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One point to make at the outset: Just as yesterday's release of the extremely important IPCC report on climate change added multiple dimensions to the problem, beyond the obvious physical effects of global warming, to include increase of poverty, competition for scarce resources which could eventuate in war, etc., the US involvement in the Middle East, using the continuing intervention in Iraq as a benchmark (although in fact America is all over the place beginning at least a half-century before the invasion of Iraq), reveals widespread destruction, much of it deliberate, and, at home, the wholesale perversion of the Constitution, and hardly irrelevant to that process, the commission of war crimes with impunity and contempt shown international law and organization. War is more than body counts and dollar amounts; bypassing direct congressional authorization in favor of continuing resolutions, so as to avoid discussion of war policies and expenditures, the



bipartisan dedication to obfuscation and government opacity, so well describes the current mood. Obama's contempt for international law matches and is at one with his contempt for government transparency—to which, in foreign policy especially, he walks in a sea of near-unanimity.

Times reporters Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt's article, "Iraqis Prepare ISIS Offensive, With U.S. Help," (Nov. 3), provides a picture of American military activity in Iraq at this stage, ISIS itself a surrogate for Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction," then, al Qaeda, and now offshoots, of which ISIS can be considered one. (It's too late to speculate, but had there never been US intervention in Iraq, and Iran before that, and its absolutistic defense of Israel, would there have been an ISIS, or, for that matter, without American bases in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden and al Qaeda?) Ah, the footprint—the reporters begin: "Iraqi security forces, backed by American-led air power and hundreds of advisers, are planning to mount a major spring offensive against Islamic State fighters who have poured into the country from Syria, a campaign that is likely to face an array of logistical and political challenges." Curiously, these challenges somehow constitute a replay or continuation of the original war paradigm: heavy American presence, training and equipment of Iraqi forces none too willing to engage in combat. (Can one blame them, proxies for advancing US geostrategic interests and exacerbating the country's internal divisions?)

They write that "the major push [having described putative gains of Iraqi and Kurdish forces], which is being devised with the help of American military planners, will require training three new Iraqi army divisions—more than 20,000 troops—over the coming months." One US military official (anonymous, as usual) explains in stilted Pentagon jargon: "It is a balance between letting them develop their own plan and take ownership for it, and ensuring that they don't stretch themselves too far and outpace their capacity." My translation: don't let them out of our sight, the "balance" being: Do exactly what we tell you. There have been air strikes since summer, but until now, "the longer-term campaign plan has remained under wraps." This is becoming increasingly revealed, to wit, attack ISIS fighters "with a goal of isolating them in major strongholds like Mosul." This accomplished (a big order!) and Iraqi troops, Kurdish pesh merga units, and, seemingly from nowhere, Sunni tribes can "take on a weakened foe that has been cut off from its supply lines and reinforcements in Syria, which are subject to American airstrikes." I am reminded of Robert Burns: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/ Gang aft a-glaid."

Bring on the military brass—Lt. Gen. James Terry, from Kuwait, to oversee US Army forces in the Middle East, and Maj. Gen. Paul Funk II, to "run a subordinate headquarters in Baghdad that will supervise the hundreds of American advisers and trainers working with Iraqi forces." A lot of activity for a handful of Americans—one suspects hundreds will soon become thousands, supplemented by private contractors. Even Gordon and Schmitt recognize the logic: "As the push to train Iraq's military gathers momentum, the American footprint is likely to expand from Baghdad and Erbil [US bombing to protect it since last August] to additional outposts, including Al Asad Air Base in Iraq's embattled Anbar Province in the west, and possibly Taji, 20 miles north of Baghdad." Sounds like an all-out effort in the making. The fear: in the intervening months to accomplish this, will ISIS "entrench in western and northern Iraq and carry out more killings."

Time is a factor, which is to say, that as the perceived emergency increases, so does the US escalation of further involvement. For now, the US "does not plan to advise Iraqi forces below the level of a brigade," (for Iraq, approx. 2,000 troops), yet, the reporters make clear, the enterprise may be more open-ended: "Nor is it clear under what circumstances the White House might allow

American advisers to accompany Iraqi units on the battlefield or to call in airstrikes [as Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, indicated might be necessary].” Why not admit the inevitable, escalation? They continue: “Iraq’s recent history suggests that such a battlefield advisory role is likely to be needed,” given its forces’ showing in 2008 in Basra against Shiite militias, “until American commanders sent their troops to advise Iraqi forces below the brigade level and facilitate airstrikes.”

Challenges abound. Someone has to train the Iraqi police, who “will be responsible for protecting areas that have been cleared by the army.” Too, the Shiite militias have to be withdrawn, disbanded, “or have their members integrated into Iraq’s security forces.” And those 5,000 Syrian rebels—their training in Saudi Arabia and Turkey has yet to begin, not to say, the task of “synchronizing the Iraqi campaign” with that effort. The more one probes the more it is obvious that the administration has given thought to the finer points of greater intervention than now admitted. Alistair Baskey, a White House spokesperson, has said that Obama’s initial figure of 1,600 tops for personnel in Iraq was “just the number of troops required for the current missions,” and an unnamed official said “it was likely the number would need to be raised.” (Joe McCarthy had his numbers game, Obama, his.) Planners had drafted the option of 3,500 more personnel, “to expand the advisory effort and speed the push to rebuild the Iraqi military.” As for increases on the Iraqi side, US officials plan to advise “roughly 24,000 troops.” But why stop there, for as they note, “the counterattack plan calls for at least doubling that force by adding three divisions, each of which could range from 8,000 to 12,000 troops.”

Not through yet, however. America is requesting that Australia, Canada, and Norway augment its role in “the training or advisory missions,” to which add, US creation of “new national guard brigades in each of Iraq’s 18 provinces,” for securing “those areas after the Iraqi army has mounted its counteroffensive.” Team Obama thinks, or thinks it thinks, of everything: “The national guard initiative has been promoted by American officials as a way for Sunnis in western and northern Iraq to play a major role in defending their territory, which would ease sectarian frictions.” And after ISIS, what next? Hamas? There’s never a dull moment on the international front—and should there be, we always have dissidents in America to harass, intimidate, destroy, the spirit of crushing an opposition truly knowing no boundaries or bounds.

My New York Times Comment on the Gordon-Schmitt article, same date, follows:

This preparation of Iraqi forces against ISIS, let’s be blunt, is a) a return of the “American footprint” to Iraq, as though hostilities had never ceased; b) is costly, though hidden, beyond public awareness—\$580M for airstrikes alone, against ISIS; and c) wholly violates the US Constitution, the Overseas Contingency Operations Budget a backdoor way for financing an illegal war—illegal?, yes, because without congressional authorization for the specific war expansion AND done by continuing resolution.

What is worse, the administration lies about withdrawal or the vast expansion of Executive Power via these sleight-of-hand means of appropriation, I leave for wiser heads to decide. The NYT parallel editorial, “The New War’s Rising Cost,” (Nov. 1), is excellent, but begs the question, “Why New”? This is Obama as usual, an election tomorrow, so why tip our hand about a never- ending intervention. Odierno is quoted in the article, “It’s a three- to four year effort.” Yes, the moment the time-line is extended, we know Obama is reaching

into his box of magic tricks to keep alive his war-lust and that of the military and intelligence communities with whom he is so close.

A suppliant Congress merely confirms the bipartisan consensus on war, intervention, assassination, and a contemptuous disregard of the Constitution. Vote 'em straight tomorrow, Americans—it doesn't matter which party: military triumphalism is the order of the day.

NOVEMBER 7, 2014

### **Electoral Nihilism**

Elections are revealing for what they hide, in the case of the US midterms just completed: a bludgeoning of American political consciousness so as to reduce understanding to such superficial outcries as gridlock in government, ego-driven politicians, a failure to do the nation's business, etc. Little if any word on the SUBSTANCE of policy-making: war, intervention, drone assassination, massive surveillance, increasing disparities of wealth, and concentration in industry, banking, media ownership, once more etc. For the list of systemic, structural, economic, and cultural developments, all pointing to the militarization and cartelization of US capitalism as an integrated societal-wide phenomenon, should by rights be the core of citizens' critical awareness, and instead has been swept into the mental/ideological black hole, by means of bipartisan near-unanimity, of electoral nihilism. Bitch aplenty, line up vocally with blue or red banners, just DON'T look closely at, let alone protest against, an emergent fascist formation each day seeking further cohesion.

The midterms were a joke—issueless where it counted most, viz., on the most fundamental questions of policy and social direction. A referendum on Obama's performance? Hardly; seemingly inconceivable, his own party found him too radical for popular consumption—which speaks volumes about how the Democratic party has wholly capitulated, in the name of War Liberalism, to the imperatives of American global hegemony and ultra-corporatism, presided over by a political-military caste themselves carrying water for a System predicated on expansion and repression rooted in its class structure, political culture, and historical DNA: the last, capitalism first, last, and always, assisted when needed by ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and of course racism, tied together in a red-white-blue-ribboned package of patriotism. With that collective, rigidified psychoanalytic defensive formation (itself merely the surface of what lay below, the concrete decision-making directed to world power and dominance), how expect those poor Democrats as well as everyone else to stand up to ruling-group—yes, such exists, though not in the tidy terms of the 1% or 0.1% of the Occupy Movement—pressures for knuckling down or under?

Obama deserves execration, not isolation. Running away from him, as happened in the midterms, is not good enough. From proverbial dogcatcher and city council member to the august halls of Congress, even to remain a Democrat is to have the BLOOD of Obama's assassinations, his pompous/dangerous confrontations with Russia and China, his contempt for civil liberties, on their hands. The party, having flunked the moral choice of democracy vs. incipient-to-ripening fascism, has no right to exist any longer. Nor is Obama a causal force (that gives him too much historical significance!), the party consecutively marching rightward following the New Deal, as the more sophisticated strategic arm of US capitalism, providing liberal gloss to the main thrust of deregulated monopolism, as juxtaposed to tried-and-true Republican right-wing reaction, to be

depended on for maintaining labor weakness, low corporate taxes, and a social climate of restrictive liberties. Both major parties are needed; they complement each other, while keeping the people safe, dumb, orderly.

The election results? Why should one even give a damn? If the Democratic showing had been stronger, the reinforcement of false consciousness would surely follow—even down to dogcatcher. And now the Republican control of both Houses of Congress—how shattering is that, when Democrats temporized on war, international law and obligation, comprehensive health care, arresting the forces of climate change, regulating the entire machinery of capitalism? For some time, on the essentials of democratic government, there has been but ONE PARTY, and that, working against a people's society in every way. And oh boy, 2014 is hailed as the dress rehearsal for 2016 and the presidential election. Hillary makes Margaret Thatcher look like Rosa Luxemburg—the viperous sting to working people and global peace, in sum, the ideal candidate of the Democrats, to be matched by (not an easy thing to differentiate their candidate from her, given Hillary's having already taken up the outer bounds of reactionary foreign and domestic policy) a Republican who reduces the other party's platform and campaign themes to still more platitudinous levels. Whomever wins, critical political consciousness loses, and strike one more nail in the coffin of democracy.

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The media call attention to alleged differences between the parties in order to keep alive the fiction of democracy in America. Out of the box early was the New York Times reporter Peter Baker (who along with David Sanger seems accorded authoritative standing in the paper and the Washington press corps), whose article, “President Obama Left Fighting for His Own Relevance,” (Nov. 5), provides an initial take on the significance of the midterms. Baker writes, “Two things were clear long before the votes were counted on Tuesday night: President Obama would face a Congress with more Republicans for his final two years in office, and the results would be seen as a repudiation of his leadership.” He emphasizes, however, Obama's refusal to see this as a repudiation, instead “an electoral map... stacked against him,” and because “his own party kept him off the trail... he never really got the chance to make his case.” To Baker's credit, he doesn't entirely buy the explanation: “Sagging in the polls and unwelcome in most competitive races across the country, Mr. Obama bristled as the last campaign that would influence his presidency played out while he sat largely on the sidelines. He privately complained that it should not be a judgment on him.”

Yet Baker like others finds a constructive side, Obama's uphill struggle for the people: “Mr. Obama now faces a daunting challenge in reasserting his relevance in a capital where he will be perceived as a lame duck. If the hope-and-change phase of his presidency is long over, he wants at least to produce a period of progress and consolidation to complete his time in the White House.” The Profiles-In-Courage myth redux, here sprinkled with comments of aides (“He's going to be aggressive”), is tempered with new-found statesmanship of reaching accommodation with Republicans on issues that matter. Fol-de-rol so far as substance, the reporter's thoughts instead on repairing acrimony between the parties, as though itself the primary issue before the American people. Bakes closes with a quotation from Anita Dunn, a former Obama adviser: “The message for anybody who's in power is that voters are looking for a change in how they approach getting things done.” Getting things done, no matter what, wins the day.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker article, same date, follows:

Repudiation of Obama—but for the wrong reasons. The country treats him as though he was a Leftist and accordingly shifts still further to the Right. The problem is less Obama than America, a rancid, belligerent people bent on militarism and global hegemony; and because Obama delivered only half-way, only drone assassination, confrontation with Russia and China, Special Ops covert warfare against popular movements, the electorate turns on him for not going far enough in a protofascistic direction.

Obama deserves no-one's respect. Like Clinton, a friend of Wall Street and financial deregulation, he has brought disgrace to a once New-Deal oriented progressive Democratic party, itself now morally bankrupt. In sum, the mid-term elections prove nothing: two parties so close together, ideologically, economically, politically, that the US is moving increasingly to the posture of Fortress America, bent on ever more destructive international policy. If we can't stay on top, we'll pull the rest of the world down with us.

Obama has been repudiated for not going to the mat with China and Russia, although in fact his EU-NATO and TPP policies, and a besotted "defense" budget, suggest he has. Good riddance to confidence man supremo!

NOVEMBER 10, 2014

### **Israeli Assault on Palestinian Identity**

[Author's note: Atrocities continue. I go back to the formative context for an understanding of today.]

The fragmentation of the Palestinian community, legacy and present reality of the Occupation, is, for the Israelis, standard operating procedure. Where population displacement, forced evacuation, and ethnic cleansing did not fully clear the military-political-ideological agenda, all steps clearly marked from Day One in the foundation year of Israeli settlement as pointing to the creation of the Jewish State, there is six-decades-and-counting later the continued process of economic-psychological pulverization of the will of whomever remains of the Palestinian people subject to permanent exile in their own land. Not a very pretty picture, indeed, so ugly that much of the world turns away, averting their gaze lest they recognize their own complicity in the power politics of scapegoat-creation to maintain a fragile equilibrium in the world system.

Israel in geopolitical terms is America in microcosm—as its fortunes go, so do those of the US in its quest since World War II to maintain its unilateral global hegemony (a course parallel to, and intersecting with, the entire history of the Israeli nation), and that, not fortuitously, but as the test case of the resolution of American power. Israel is to America perhaps what India had been to Britain earlier, a structural pivot point in their respective frameworks of global imperialism—a jewel in the crown, except that in India the colonial project was one of subjugation and spoliation via the extraction of riches, while in Israel we see, for Israelis, as one of us, in the top tier of “world-civilizing races,” a partnership-of-equals established for purposes of mutual advantage: Israel, a regional powerhouse as outpost of militarism and technological achievement making its way in the world economy while safeguarding America's strategic posture in the heartland not only

of oil but also, as global crossroads, that of providing a commanding position with respect to Europe, Africa, Asia, and more particularly, Russia and China. To Israel: We have your back; to America: Your global network of bases notwithstanding, we are your true, devoted (nuclear-armed) friends, the most dependable ally in reinforcing your world power. For your power is ours, your success, ours.

Symbolically, if one had to choose a single item, this bonding as mutual purveyors of repression, itself an emotional cement bar none in holding nations together, can be found in the massacres each committed, My Lai and Deir Yassin—windows into a mind-set that compels asking the question, Can one fathom the darkness and depravity of these events? (I am here reminded of attending a Jewish Studies lecture at my university and asking the speaker—my having just read a book by the Israeli historian Benny Morris which described widespread rape by Jewish soldiers—about IDF atrocities, to which her only reply was, “soldiers will be soldiers.”) My Lai and Deir Yassin share certain elements in common, not, however, as testifying to some universal principle of soldier-ness, but specific concrete structure, policies, and values of societies founded on militarism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia supported by a command-system of hierarchical power, be it of whatever complexion. Not all soldiers rape and murder; hegemonic social orders, on the other hand, require a paradigm of repression to keep their order, stability, and lines of authority intact.

My Lai, March 16, 1968, American forces brutally murdered between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians, platoon leader William Calley personally killing 22 villagers, then receiving (after an extensive cover-up) a brief sentence under house arrest. The orders were to kill everyone, men, women, children, infants, burn down the houses, destroy the drinking wells, leave nothing standing. On approach, people in the rice fields, in the village, machine-gun without warning all in sight; women and children praying, shot in the head; 70-80 villagers herded into an irrigation ditch, shot; women covering their children, shot, then the children, shot. My Lai was not the only massacre, Bin Hoa and others—integral to the game plan. In what follows, we find national-companions in bloodshed, but the emphasis in this article is on Israel, and hence greater attention to Deir Yassin.

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First we turn to Arno Mayer’s excellent *Ploughshares into Swords* for context and overview, the run-up to and surrounding events of Israel’s Independence, May 14, 1948, a period of obvious upheaval, armed raids on both sides, but, standing out, Irgun and Lehi paramilitary acts of atrocity, as in bombings of bus stations and crowded areas (Haganah and Zionist leadership, especially Ben-Gurion, looking quietly on). Territorial expansion was a primary uncontested goal of all Zionist factions from the start, as boundaries were deliberately ignored or misconstrued and terrorist acts were intended to frighten Palestinians and encourage their flight. Conflict was everywhere, frequently centered on the strategic routes, such as the road to supply Jerusalem (Deir Yassin a small prosperous village, living at peace with its Jewish neighbor, Givat Shaul, was situated on a hill overlooking that highway). Mayer writes, “To avoid being caught up in the escalating crossfire, members of the Palestinian Arab upper and middle classes began to leave Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem to seek temporary refuge in the capitals of neighboring Arab countries—close to 30,000 by the end of March [1948].” And this, just the start of a mass exodus, the atrocities at Deir Yassin in part calculated to be an object lesson to frighten and stampede the Palestinian population into terrified flight. (If my thoughts here of ethnic cleansing as a primordial aim of occupation policy are viewed as an exaggeration, I make no apology—this was already the strategy 1947-8, formalized as

Plan D or Dalet, “the official Zionist intent to expand the state beyond the allocated territory.” (Mayer states, “before long the armed forces of the inchoate Jewish state increased its designated 5,400 square miles by 2,300 miles.”)

Not bad, surely a good running start on the eve of Independence: “Plan D was activated in late March 1948 [just weeks before the Deir Yassin massacre—NP], coincident with the arrival of urgently needed Czech arms. Within six weeks the Hagana[h] and underground forces seized some 180 Arab villages and five Arab cities, most of them on the far side of the U.N. line. Breaking the indigenous resistance, they occupied Tiberias, Haifa, and western Jerusalem during the second half of April and Safed, Jaffa, and Acre during the first half of May. Many of the Arab inhabitants escaped or fled to neighboring countries, and the victors appropriated their land and property.” Thus Deir Yassin did not stand alone; as in the case of similar atrocities, it may well have fallen under the radar screen at that moment. What follows is the dynamite of Mayer’s analysis, the utter cruelty and systemization of death on Israelis’ part, which cannot but help resonate with Israel’s present-day conduct in Gaza as a direct line of historical causation shaping and reinforcing the mind-set of a nation (just as My Lai has done the same for America).

He writes, “The willed or forced departure of about 380,000 Arabs during these months considerably enhanced the ethnic homogeneity of the state-to-be. But what was in part an historically routine politico-military campaign was otherwise marked by the worst horrors of irregular and unconventional warfare: arbitrary executions, massacres, rape, arson, looting.” I am struck by the words “an historically routine politico-military campaign,” because of the evident violation, as in My Lai, of the accepted norm of war conduct, now transmogrified as WAR CRIMES, that soldiers-will-be-soldiers is a pathetic defense hardly exonerative. Mayer continues: “These unexpected [I cannot share the author’s generosity here, particularly when he notes the deliberateness of conduct] but neither adventitious nor minor savageries of war gave wings to the fleeing Arab Palestinians.” In sum, with mass killings in the air as official policy, nothing is unexpected, the deeds themselves an indelible mark on a nation’s history, humaneness, and integrity. Sorry for what may seem to others an oversimplification, but not to me: My Lai is America, Deir Yassin is Israel. (Mayer, I’m certain, would be in agreement, my jumping on “unexpected” only to make the point, hopefully not at his expense, about the core of repression in policies of this character.)

Superbly, in discussing this foundation period, he reveals the dimensions of barbarism of Israel’s policy: “In 1948 there were at least twenty massacres carried out by Jews, five of them claiming more than seventy victims each. [Any reason to doubt the stimulus to forced evacuation—and why the right of return should have the highest MORAL standing among people of good will?] More often than not the assailants were army officers and common soldiers who thought they were carrying out orders. There is no record that any were ever called to account, and in some instances higher military and civilian leaders had tacitly given their approval. Irgun and Lehi militants were implicated, but enjoyed their customary impunity.” Given this background, Deir Yassin was bound to happen, less to protect the road to Jerusalem than to let the Israeli armed forces demonstrate their might and so facilitate the transfer of the population out, thus creating the refugee problem as the salience of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Deir Yassin, April 9, 1948. Mayer’s succinct summary says it all. Early morning stand-off, Irgun-Lehi forces, later joined by Palmach (Haganah’s voluntary elite unit), assault the village: “A

terrible fury followed. At least 100 villagers were slaughtered—mainly old men, women, and children. But the rage of the marauders was beyond measuring. They murdered, raped, and looted and blew up and scorched unevacuated houses. Finally, several traumatized residents were forced into an open truck and taken to Jerusalem. Accompanied by jubilant Jewish soldiers brandishing rifles, they were driven through jeering Jewish neighborhoods before returning to a summary execution in Deir Yassin.” Bread-and-circuses of a depraved society—I say, “depraved,” because no-one in authority has ever taken responsibility, not to say the acts themselves, including parading the victims before excited crowds (like recently the crowds who turned out on the Siderot hillside in a carnival atmosphere to watch the bombing/shelling of Gaza). We have perhaps come a long way from the late-1940s—violence as spectator sport having been made easier via remote control, just as, instead of tossing hand grenades into the houses of Deir Yassin (seen momentarily from other accounts) before barging in guns blazing, we find giant machinery bulldozing homes in destroying Palestinian villages.

When Arab governments intervened five weeks later, Deir Yassin and Israel’s Independence became fused in their eyes, a conflict that would have occurred in any case in light of the clear expansionist plans of the Israeli leadership and the population displacement already under way, but the village’s atrocities added determination to the Arabs’ cause. Going back a step, we see Deir Yassin as a seeming byproduct of liberating the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway, the road having been cut-off the month before, Jerusalem now put under siege. While Palmach struck nearby on April 6, Irgun and Lehi swung into action at Deir Yassin on the 9th. There was already, from January 20, a peace pact signed between it and Givat Shaul, the latter’s residents actually trying to stop the subsequent slaughter, to no avail—an effort matched by Deir Yassin villagers on February 13, who helped repel an armed gang which attacked Givat Shaul, and, for their pains, found their sheep killed by the gang. (This makes the Irgun-Lehi violence all the more gratuitous and repulsive, as though manufacturing and then ensuring hostility between the Arab and Jewish communities.)

Irgun and Lehi are the extremists that make Haganah look good. Irgun specialized in bombings, Lehi in assassinations—at Deir Yassin Palmach (part of Haganah) supplied ammunition to the others and shot at fleeing villagers. Why the attack? An Irgun member explained that for the first time Jewish forces were going on the offensive and this had to show the Arabs Jewish determination. David Shaltiel, Haganah’s commander in Jerusalem, went along with the attack plan, despite the peace pact and urgings to give the villagers warning. At the Irgun-Lehi planning session there was agreement about expelling them, and disagreement about whether to kill all who didn’t flee. The pre-attack briefing was reported to be festive, here paramilitary forces could come out in the open—and express solidarity with one another. The attack itself, on orders of the Irgun commander, Ben Zion Cohen, was house-to-house, two hand grenades per house thrown through the doors and windows before going in, soon supplemented by explosives killing all inside. The fighting began shortly before 5 a.m. and was over by 11 a.m., the head of the International Red Cross in Palestine visiting two days later finding “more than 200 dead, men, women, children.” A disputed number of villagers (25-80) were executed after the fighting stopped, their bodies dumped in a quarry.

Benny Morris, anathema to faculty members in Jewish Studies at my university, quotes Meir Pa’il, a Palmach intelligence officer who on April 9th viewed the village first-hand: “The dissidents [Irgun and Lehi] were going about the village robbing and stealing everything. Chickens, radio sets,



sugar, money, gold and more.... Each dissident walked about the village dirty with blood and proud of the number of persons he had killed.” There were 55 children, their parents now killed, who were dropped at the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem and left there, a member of the well-known Husseini family in Palestine taking them in and caring for them. Finally, Yitzhak Levy, of Haganah Intelligence, reported that Irgun men “raped a number of Arab girls and murdered them afterward.”

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Jumping to the present, we see Naftali Bennett in a New York Times op-ed entitled, “Two-State Is No Solution,” (Nov. 5), presenting an unrepentant rejection of meaningful negotiation, therefore leaving the status quo of Occupation and resulting Palestinian oppression and humiliation wholly intact. In a careful analysis of Bennett’s parsing of Areas A, B, and C, of the paradigm for establishing Palestinian rights and sovereignty, John Whitbeck, an international lawyer, writing a CounterPunch article, “Naftali Bennett’s Wake Up Call to the West,” (Nov. 7-9), explores the shortcomings and hidden reservations signaling Israeli hard-line attitudes and policy toward any kind of just resolution of the suffering and plight of the Palestinian people. For an additional take, emphasis in accordance with the above, my New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

Step one: eradication of Palestinian sovereignty; step two, further tighten the Occupation under a new name. No, Bennett, your words fool no-one (except those who wish to be deceived). You cite rocket attacks into Israel, yet do not mention saturation bombing, wildly disproportionate casualty numbers, blockade, daily humiliation of the Palestinian people, a history of domination symbolized by periodic atrocities, destruction of homes, killing of minors.

There will not be peace—the continuity of contempt for Palestinians by Israeli leaders from Ben-Gurion, Meir, Shamir, etc. down to today, hardly speaks of PEACE, respect, much less honoring Torah teachings. Bennett, read Arno Mayer’s *Ploughshares into Swords*, in case your mind is blank about the Israeli mindset and practices. As a Jew deeply appreciative of Judaism’s contribution to the world’s moral-ethical heritage, and deeply reverent to Judaism as the religion of my mother and father, I say: Israel contaminates Judaism with its militarism, arrogance, oppression of the weak, its international role of backing fascist-type governments which themselves murder Jews—Israel, God is watching, will someday pay the price for its Nazi-like conduct toward others in the present day.

Stifle internal dissent. Push the propaganda barrage that Jewish critics of Israel are self-hating Jews, sorry, we see through you. We’ve got your number: Oppression, the name of the game. Even Labor joins Likud on this.

NOVEMBER 12, 2014

### **APEC Summit in Beijing**

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit is now underway. The subtext of the meeting is the transformation of international politics, and sub-subtext, a Russia-China rapprochement directly in the path of US global military-political-economic dominance, unilateral hegemonic power since World War II vs. an until recently slowly emergent decentralization of the world power system shaking its foundations and today rapidly a qualitative shift to a new ballgame in which America is

no longer the exclusive center or chief architect of the international order. Obama the paper tiger, all smiles, enters the den of, by his own construction (the Pacific-First Pivot AND the Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership, one shifting military assets to the region, the other, a negotiated trade pact excluding China), America's Public Enemy No. 1: China. Of course, Russia is a very close second, and both Li and Putin will be present in Beijing attending the summit. Putin already sees through him; Li is getting there. I'm afraid their own tango, the very thing Obama and the US seek to break up, never allow to coalesce, will exclude him; increasingly, he will dance alone as the world catches on to his totalitarian patter. (Do chastise Li for cyberespionage while changing the subject about massive surveillance of the American people, extended to eavesdropping on foreign leaders; do chastise Putin on Ukraine while changing the subject about US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, covert operations for regime change—including Kiev—worldwide, and, most fitting, drone assassination.)

There is a lot on the table in Beijing, spheres-of-influence canapés, nuclear-modernization soup (for improved lethality), the main course of American-inspired counterrevolution, and for dessert, the possibility of breaking the hold of the IMF and World Bank on shaping global development with the proposed Asia Infrastructure Bank. In all cases, Obama will find to his discomfiture a united front of Li and Putin, themselves shifting the axis of world power away from America and Europe, Russia clearly looking eastward in response to the US-EU sanctions regime, threats, bluster, and all-around hostility. Europe needs Russia more than Russia needs Europe, while America, perceiving that China has become the world's leading economic power, can only double-up on militarism, aggressiveness in all its forms, and perhaps a sinking or sneaking realization of DECLINE. Whatever came of the American Century, is now dead, buried, and unmourned (particularly in Asia, Latin America, and perhaps Africa).

Obama may therefore smile, clasp shoulders, engage in small talk, but he represents a dying order, tied together with Wall Street baling wire of financial skullduggery and bundled in the wrapping of military power. China can afford to be charitable, a gracious host, but that only drives home the message: US stop turning the world inside out to your own advantage, your CIA fun-and-games, your control of the international financial system. You've had your shock-and-awe bombings, your My Lai massacres, your counterterrorism-ballyhoo as a means of designing compliance into the US war machine, your abysmal record of wealth-distribution (hardly comporting with the definition and expectations of a democratic society). So, what, Mr. Obama, do you bring to the table at the APEC summit? Precious little, as Asia, despite your personal actions and your country's geopolitical planning, comes into its own, with Russia now shifting eastward in a spirit of cooperative advancement.

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For context, let me look first at Nicholas Kristof's New York Times op. ed. article, "A Changed China Awaits Mr. Obama," (Nov. 9), Kristof the paper's humanitarian poster boy, who appears to be moving increasingly to the Right. ("Humanitarian" as in the Samantha Power version of liberal humanitarianism oddly conducive to the pursuit of American self-interest.) Immediately he jumps on China, his swipe at Xi interchangeable with our customary demonization of Putin. Before the visit, Obama "has already been mocked," the state-run Global Times stating, "He has done an insipid job, offering nothing to his supporters. U.S. society has grown tired of his banality." (I wish I could have said that, but the Global Times beat me to it!) And Kristof exclaims: "What a

welcome! Global Times is often shrill, but that tone reflects the way President Xi Jinping is tugging his regime in a more nationalistic, assertive and hard-line direction.” Like an incantation, nationalistic, assertive, hard-line are standard descriptive terms applied to Putin and Russia as well—and presumably anyone else large enough to command notice in crossing America’s path. Kristof is not to blame; it is in the DNA of present-day American journalism. Either you are for us or against us, the ethnocentrism woven into the US ideology and political culture.

Regrettably the article is also self-serving: “Then there’s something a bit more personal: China doesn’t seem to want to give me a visa.” He recovers his poise, so as to counterattack: “Xi has been ruling China for two years now, and he has shown some inclination toward economic and social reforms. Two years ago, I thought Xi might open things up a bit. Boy, was I wrong! Instead, it increasingly seems that Xi may deepen reforms in some areas but, over all, is a tough-minded nationalist who takes a hard line on multiple fronts so as to challenge nearly everything that Obama stands for[.]” (That should not be hard, for anyone on the continuum from social democrat to Marxist. As one approaches Centrism and then turns Right, however, it becomes difficult to challenge him—and no reason for doing so—at all.) What are the multiple fronts? An aggressive stand on maritime disputes in the East China and South China Seas; repression of dissidents—Xu Zhiyong and Liu Xiaobo; and controls on the Internet. One does not have to be an apologist for repression of dissent in China (Kristof is correct), but why ignore worse or equally bad in the US, as in Espionage Act prosecution of whistleblowers under Obama? Perhaps worst in Kristof’s view, China is not doing so badly: “Xi comes across as cocky and proud that China is now booming and strong, and he has been willing to poke his finger in the American eye.”

Poor POTUS, the cards are being stacked against him: “All this creates a challenge for Obama. The United States doesn’t have many China experts in senior roles, and neither in Beijing nor Washington are many officials fighting for an improved relationship.” Then, too, there is cyberwarfare—which will not go away. Kristof wants China “to step up and play a constructive role [he praises its work on Ebola in Liberia]...especially on climate change.” But on balance, he appears ready for confrontation: “So for those of us who love the Middle Kingdom, it’s sad to see it veer toward a nationalistic and repressive line under Xi. Obama won’t be able to change China, but he too often signaled weakness in the Middle East and Ukraine. In China, he should stand firm.” Signaled weakness? Kristof here comes full circle to Russia, and implicitly, the Russia-China rapprochement, on which Obama also must stand firm.

Peter Baker, The New York Times’s political savant poster boy, deservedly when he is on, as now, has an article, “As Russia Draws Closer to China, U.S. Faces a New Challenge,” (Nov. 8), which cuts to the chase on power politics through showing Washington’s concern about the possible game-changer in world politics. For decades, America was confident China and Russia would never find sufficient common ground to mount a collective challenge to US world supremacy. And rightly so, Mao and Stalin in fratricidal struggle over rival ideological claims and coveted territorial expansion. That time has passed, not simply because of leadership changes on both sides and developmental trajectories containing significant elements of capitalism in each, but also because the US in its own hubristic quest for global supremacy has acted to bring the two nations together, unavoidably so, in light of the xenophobic mistrust America has of any social system not replicating its own. The US containment of Russia and China, decades old, in fact the cornerstone of its foreign policy as crystallized in the Cold War, always had the potential for culminating in war—to which

the other two countries could never be indifferent. Finally, the marriage of borscht and chow mein, like Germany's much-vaunted marriage of iron and rye, has a formulaic splendor for announcing, on the world stage, a new configuration of POWER.

None of this is in Baker's article (his good fortune), except the US concern over what this configuration spells for the eclipse of America's power. From now on, global unilateralism is pie-in-the-sky ideology. Yet, the nation appears stone-deaf to reality. Obama comes to Beijing, he writes, "to renew efforts to refocus American foreign policy toward Asia," where Putin, "who has done so much to frustrate him lately," is also present. Baker quotes the Russian ambassador to Washington: "You are pivoting to Asia, but we're already there." (It should be added, the US pivot was initially and still is largely military both in conception and practice, while the Russian pivot is diplomatic and economic, a fraternal rather than an adversarial relationship.) Baker acknowledges the obvious, that Obama comes to Asia "as Russia pulls closer to China," thus "presenting a profound challenge to the United States and Europe." Putin, "estranged from the West over Ukraine," is in Beijing seeking "economic and political support, trying to UPEND THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER by fashioning a coalition to resist what both countries view as American arrogance." (My caps.)

There is skepticism among officials and specialists that the coalition would be possible, an issue setting off "a vigorous debate in Washington," but others think "the Obama administration should take the threat seriously as Moscow pursues energy, financing and military deals with Beijing," each in turn of importance, e.g., the military fitting into a common defense posture. Kislyak, the Russian ambassador in Washington, translates the pivot as a broader shift of direction: "We are more and more interested in the region that is next to us in Asia. They are good partners to us." The recent natural gas deal between the two countries foreshadowed the future: "It's just the beginning, and you will see more and more projects between us and China." Here Baker has the sense to recognize that, from the US perspective, Russia and China must be treated as interrelated problems facing American foreign policy: "The Russian pivot to China factors into a broader White House-led review of American policy toward Moscow now underway."

One gets to Moscow via Beijing—again not Baker's thought, but clearly in the thought of the national security advisers. The US wants its cake and eats it, opposition to what is being called "Putinism... while still seeking silos of cooperation, particularly on issues like Iran, terrorism and nuclear proliferation." We need these guys, but only on US terms, the imagery of the silo—heard with greater frequency in policy circles—that of a sealed storage unit that excludes air, suggesting issue compartmentalization while leaving the status quo/wider context intact. Ideally, there would be continued prosecution of the Cold War, yet, by invitation, support of causes we deem appropriate—with no promise of, or desire for, working toward better relations. (Very much the way Israeli occupation policy affects the Palestinians—occasional cooperation when necessary, but the hemmed-in people of a wider silo whose condition is unaltered.)

What, then, of Russia? "Though there is not a wide divergence of opinion inside the administration over how to view Mr. Putin," Baker writes, "there is a debate about what to do." The range of disagreement is absurdly small: engagement vs. containment (the former of course supposing a strong element of the latter), although he doesn't realize it; operationally, "the main question is how the Ukraine dispute should define the relationship and affect other areas where the two countries share interests." But if that is the case, Ukraine front and center, then Team Obama

(Brennan, Rice, Power, and their military counterpart) has resolutely dug in for the Great Confrontation. And now, “within the administration, Mr. Putin’s efforts at accord with China are seen as a jab at Washington”—what else could it be, though “jab” understates the reality. Still there is disbelief in Washington; the Russia-China relationship is one “fraught with a complicated history, mutual distrust and underlying economic disparity that ultimately makes it untenable.” One insider (as usual, anonymous) is fairly typical: “‘They’ll use each other. And when one of them gets tired or sees a better deal [where?], they’ll take it.’” Dream on, proverbial cynic.

Actually, some American academics find the potential for an accord good. Gilbert Rozman of Princeton, who wrote “The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order,” states, “‘There’s just so much evidence the relationship is getting stronger.... [It began prior to Ukraine, and now there is a] sense that there’s no turning back.’” Graham Allison of Harvard speculates, of the Li-Putin relationship, “‘There’s a personal chemistry you can see. They like each other, and they can relate to each other. They talk with each other with a candor and a level of cooperation they don’t find in other partners.’” Then the nitty-gritty: In May, at the time US-EU sanctions were imposed, Putin negotiated a \$400B, 30-year deal providing China natural gas, and in October, China’s premier, Li Keqiang, “signed a package of 38 deals in Moscow, including a currency swap and tax treaty.” And only last week, Putin announced another gas deal in the works with China. China is now Russia’s largest trading partner. Sergei Rogov, of Moscow’s Institute for U.S. and Canada Studies, summarizes for us: “‘The campaign of economic sanctions against Russia and political pressure is alienating Russia from the West and pushing it closer to China. China is perceived in Russia as a substitute for Western credits and Western technology.’”

To Baker’s credit, he also presents rational arguments for the downside of the accord, notably, the big economic disadvantage for Russia: “In Moscow, some fear Russia, out of weakness, has made itself a junior partner to a rising China. While China is now Russia’s largest trading partner, Russia is only China’s 10th largest—and the United States remains the biggest. Moreover, big Russian state companies can make deals, but China will not replace Europe for most corporations and banks, as there is no developed commercial bond market for foreigners in China akin to Eurobonds.” Yet Ambassador Kislyak again: Given that US-EU long-term partners are problematic strengthens the turn to China: “‘We trust them, and we hope that China trusts us.’” After Beijing, there is also the Group of 20 in Brisbane, where Obama and Putin will again be present—Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership, which excludes both Russia and China, not calculated to assuage their feelings or engender respect.

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In this preliminary assessment of APEC and future relations of the Three Powers, I turn to Washington Post reporters David Nakamura and Steven Mufson’s article, “Obama, Xi to meet in Beijing amid political and economic strains,” (Nov. 9), coolly realistic when, in describing the planned opening fireworks, they say, “But there is little to celebrate. In the 18 months since Obama and Xi first met ,” the two countries “have confronted each other over Asian security, territorial claims, economic cyberespionage and U.S. opposition to China’s proposal for a new Asian Infrastructure bank.” This last, often passed over, reveals not only America’s pressures on behalf of the World Bank and IMF, but also a partial remedy for Russian business concerns about developed financial institutions in China. And they come right to the point: “Beneath those issues lie larger questions of how the United States adjusts to a more prosperous and outward-looking China and

whether China's rise bumps up against the United States and its allies in the Pacific or whether all nations will benefit."

Adjustment via military and trade expansion is no adjustment, expectation of universal benefits itself defying the American paradigm of commercial-financial-industrial penetration, in which the US seeks to best China and all comers, though hardly realistic as, in myriad markets in Asia and the world, China has already outperformed America. The reporters are not overly sanguine about the APEC summit, noting, "A string of nasty articles about foreign forces has appeared recently on blogs and in the state-run media, coloring the political atmosphere." They nonetheless see a good-faith effort on both sides (e.g., the administration did not overtly support the demonstrators in Hong Kong), and criticism of Obama in China is muted, the midterm elections pointed to as reducing his stature though he is credited with still having a free-hand in foreign policy. To be avoided, they write, is misunderstanding over semantics, the use of "pivot to Asia" having been construed by the Chinese (I think, correctly) as provocative of war, so now the Obama administration has a new phrase, the strategic "rebalance" for the region. Why not? The moon is made of green cheese.

Obama's idea of striking a balance between "accommodation and firmness" seems like gobbledygook the moment preconditions for the former are set (the same silo-effect): Do your part on Ebola, but don't challenge US power—in its various forms, and anywhere in the world. Yes, China is assertive; assigned a junior-grade status in contradiction to prevailing global dynamics, its own ascent, and America's decline, makes the situation ripe for challenges to US power. Last year at this time, Secretary Rice, speaking at Georgetown, made clear the gradations of acceptable power, the US managing "inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge," i.e., China as super errand-boy in bringing North Korea and Iran into line. Not surprisingly, two days after her speech, China took to the skies, announcing an air-defense zone over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which served notice on Japan and South Korea that China had full intention to act on its interests (its real audience of course was the US), to which America, in response, flew two B-52s over the zone. The friction between the two countries will not be dispelled by last night's display of fireworks, but the interesting point, no doubt the US gnashing its teeth, is the amicable Xi-Abe meeting, possibly long in preparation, at APEC, foiling America's divide-and-conquer strategy between Japan and China.

The reporters point out that in April, when Obama visited Tokyo, although he did not take a stand on the disputed islands' sovereignty, he did emphasize the US "would defend Japan against any attack based on their long-standing security treaty—marking the first time a U.S. president said so." It is precisely this fishing in troubled waters (pardon the pun) that China's growing influence in the region may put to an end. Yet my guess is that this island tit-for-tat merely hides more underlying issues. While the US-China bilateral trade is some \$562B, America uses as a test of good international behavior the acceptance of the World Bank and IMF (so as to structure trade, finance, and investment in its favor, here, in a decisive region of the world economy), while China makes no secret of labeling these institutions as "U.S.-led proxies aimed at maintaining the West's advantage." How Obama can appear at APEC with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, excluding China, in his pocket, is pure chutzpah.

I'm not an old-fashioned economic determinist, but am intrigued by the proposed bank and what it means for undercutting US power and influence in the region. Nakamura-Mufson seem to have caught on. They write: "Last month, China overtook the United States as the world's largest

economy, but Beijing is frustrated by the failure of the United States to give it a bigger voice at the IMF, where it has only a 3.81 percent voting share—smaller than France.” To an American colonialist/imperialist France may seem larger, more important, than China, but what I perceive, APEC being merely symptomatic, is, as in the quoted portion with caps. seen above, the upending of the international order is very much in prospect and on the historical agenda, exactly what the US most fears and can—except for outlandish military acts—do little about. The end of the American Imperium: an exciting prospect for much of the remainder of the world, even some force-fed US “friends and allies.” Here then, they continue, to such cavalier treatment (the IMF an especially sensitive barometer of US policy valuations—who the good guys and bad guys are) China now fights back: “In response, Beijing has sought to establish its own multilateral institutions, foremost a new Beijing-based Asian infrastructure bank initially funded with \$50 billion from China.”

The gnashing of teeth, hopefully not the next step, deliberately provoking a war. One Japanese official is quoted as saying (in a way, the mirror-image of what America has succeeded in doing, rendering the US-China rivalry all the keener): “The idea of the bank is that China would assist in development, but really they want the bank as projecting an Asia organized by China.” (The Chinese are proving apt students of American policy.) Things are moving fast. “On Oct. 24,” they write, “China signed a memorandum with 21 countries, excluding South Korea, Australia and Indonesia, to establish the infrastructure bank. The Australian Financial Review reported that Kerry had personally asked Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott TO KEEP AUSTRALIA OUT.” (My caps.) Kerry, dutiful servant of power. The reporters: “But many experts say the Obama administration is waging a losing battle.” And they quote Wing Thye Woo of UC, Davis, who has this common-sense observation: “For the U.S. Treasury to go about telling people to not do what is in your best interests is shooting ourselves in our foot.” Obama had best have thick soles in Beijing.

A final point: Obama landed in Beijing, hitting the ground running, his immediate challenge, how to break open China’s market to American business. (Lord Crassness, have you no shame?) The TPP, by excluding China, an obvious nonstarter to bruit about, so, according to Mark Landler’s New York Times article, “Obama Arrives in China on Trip With Complex Agenda,” (Nov. 10), “Obama’s main commercial proposal for the Chinese will be a new bilateral investment treaty between the countries. Economists said it could be the most significant opening of the Chinese market for American companies since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001.” A one-sided arrangement, chutzpah compounded. US businesspeople see the treaty as a test of Xi’s intentions. “It would require the Chinese,” Landler writes, “to open dozens of sensitive markets, some that remained closed to American companies, or required Chinese partners.” The US-China Business Council, perhaps Obama’s new dancing partner should he get lonely in Beijing.

My New York Times Comment on the Kristof article, same date, follows:

I’m disappointed that China would even invite Obama, particularly after his “pivot” of military assets to the Pacific, a very clear indication of US attempts to contain and isolate if not also dismember China (precisely the same policy directed to Russia). The US has adopted a hostile stance toward China, as in encouraging PM Abe to rearm contrary to Japan’s constitution. US-Philippine joint-maneuvers are also directed against China, as are the efforts to coordinate policies with Australia to the same end.

The US seeks confrontation, making Obama's visit a farce. Xi should adopt the same skepticism toward America that Putin does, and with Putin seek a de-centered global structure no longer the one we've seen of US unilateral global hegemony. Obama is a spoiler, anything for war and intervention. I'm sure China realizes this and I hope it gives him the cold shoulder so that he doesn't entertain ideas of seeing it as a pushover in international politics (the opening he seeks for renewed tensions). The test for Monday's visit is whether or not he will renounce TPP, which of course he won't. Trade, for Obama, is just one more mode of encirclement.

NOVEMBER 17, 2014

### **Brisbane Lynching**

Obama's Pacific-First strategy, the so-called "pivot" to Asia, implemented through a shift in military assets to a theater of operations designated in geopolitical planning and strategy as America's major arena for political-economic-ideological EXPANSION, and therefore, the means of maintaining its global hegemony in the face of the simultaneous rise to power of Russia and China, themselves brought into closer working relationship to counter US unipolar world leadership/dominance, has been put on display at the G-20 Summit meeting in Australia. Beijing provided the springboard for the splendidly executed, intentionally directed, one-two punch against China and Russia in the more formal inauguration of a foreign policy aimed at the re-polarization of the international system. "Re-" is of course arbitrary, for the US never abandoned through thick and thin the Cold War framework as, in every respect, most suited to the organization and mobilization of American power—in the service of the national interest, yes, but as mediated through the lens of advanced capitalism as the only secure and acceptable holistic posture.

Whether American Exceptionalism drives Capitalism in America, or Capitalism drives Exceptionalism, is best left to nationalistic metaphysicians and ideologues, so intertwined are they throughout US history. But without the Cold War mentality and political economy of financial-industrial militarism, America would not be where it is—or rather, has been during the period since 1900, a steadily ascendant world power not challenged until now. Here Obama takes on world-historical significance, not, obviously, in his own right, a trickster, con man, moral cipher with unbending ambition (disguised as "cool"), but as presiding formally over a System menaced by its own impending decline and the transformation of the world structure of power. Impending decline: militarism sucking the lifeblood from a polity nominally democratic but incapable of sustaining a social-welfare underpinning that would provide a decency of living conditions (i.e., strong safety net) and semblance at least of equalitarian class and race relations. And transformation of the world structure of power: despite America's single-minded counterrevolution on a global scale, Third World nations are emerging from dependency on the US and finding other sources of support and opportunity, while on the main stage very definite independent centers of power have de-centered the global framework, led by China and Russia—not coincidentally, the main targets of American hostility.

Ergo (and by that I'm not sarcastic or simplistic), we see at this historical moment the US re-polarization of the world structure, an upward notching of the Cold War which had been allowed to simmer under the radar, in recognition that this alone can keep America at the top: a dramatization



of conflict, Putin and Russia especially as scapegoats, by which to rally the EU and other “friends and allies” into a unified front, under US leadership, against the Forces of Darkness, the hodgepodge (here throw in China, ISIS, whatever can be made to terrify a confused public) necessitating a stabilization of the status quo.

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This is the context for Brisbane. Without an apparent major blunder at Beijing—his pushing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership at the meetings, because excluding China and Russia, and more, done specifically to curtail their influence and activity in the region, not called out as inappropriate if not also hostile—Obama comes to Brisbane on winged foot, the darling of like-minded members of G-20 who are satisfied with US global leadership, satellites of the metropole in the shared distribution of global wealth (and prepared to solidify the arrangement through military support), because he allegedly held his own with Xi and, that to his credit, could lead in the ostracism of Putin. Exactly what happened, Putin made the renegade, the likes of Stephen Harper and Tony Abbott throwing barbs from behind Obama’s ample nuclear-armed backside, while he himself danced around the word “invasion” in characterizing Russia’s role in the Ukraine. Cold War II, if you will, off to a good start.

Actually, despite reaching several agreements, Obama and Xi gave the clear impression that little had changed, Obama still able to conjure up China as an Enemy-in-waiting, and Xi, mindful of the American deployment of forces to the Pacific, had no illusions about partnerships or even stability in the region free from US continued attempts at China’s containment and isolation. On that point, Obama’s denial was itself confirmation of the opposite. At the closing news conference, as reported by New York Times correspondent Mark Landler, Nov. 12, Obama said that his meetings with Xi “had given him the chance to debunk the notion that ‘our pivot to Asia is about containing China.’” What else could it be about, especially in tandem with the Trans-Pacific Partnership and continued joint-military maneuvers in the area (e.g., with the Philippines)? Landler notes the lack of personal warmth between the two leaders. Tensions surfaced at the press conference. Even though there may be a common interest on issues such as climate change, North Korea, and Iran, Landler, revealing his own Cold war bias, writes that there are “countervailing tensions when a rising power flexes its muscles against an established one, and as a Communist empire bristles at the judgments [US criticism of press freedom in China] of a powerful democracy. All of this was on vivid display Wednesday.” We’re back to Red China, and that “powerful democracy,” America.

Landler’s dispatches from Brisbane are more factual; his article, “Finishing Asia Tour, Obama Promotes More Ambitious Foreign Policy,” (Nov. 15), strikes the correct note in seeing a foreign-policy shift of some kind, though he is unclear as to its significance. Not “a landmark climate-change agreement with China, a trade deal with the Chinese on technology products,” progress on pushing TPP, or the “pledge to a climate-change fund for developing countries” defines what constitutes “ambitious,” but rather the confrontation with Russia and China as presumed interrelated threats, always implied in earlier Cold War assumptions and practices, now becomes more direct and pointed as Obama bounces from one to the other seeking to tie them together in policy terms: Ukraine, the downing of MH-17, sanctions, and, on China, a more generalized threat of a Red Asia via military expansion. For “friends and allies,” the propaganda offensive worked like a charm, Obama, the Man of the Hour.

In his last Asia trip (the Philippines in April) Obama talked about hitting singles and doubles and avoiding “reckless errors”; now—but for disputed reasons—over the fence. “The scorecard for this trip looks drastically different from the last one,” the reason being climate change, etc., stiffening his back, or as his (to me) ventriloquist, Ben Rhodes, always on point for such occasions, put it: “Even as we have to manage crises, we want to make sure we’re focusing on an affirmative agenda. I think that’s the common thread on this trip.” Part of the full-court persuasion was the ballyhoo about US economic performance, what Landler termed the pursuit of “more expansionary economic policies to stimulate demand and create jobs,” because IMF-World Bank oriented designedly widening differences with the adversaries. Hints are dropped. “Even in Brisbane,” Landler closes, “where he spoke hopefully of the reinvigorated American role in Asia, Mr. Obama referred to the other headaches he faced, singling out the international response to the ‘appalling’ downing of a Malaysian jetliner in Ukraine, which killed 38 Australian citizens and residents.”

Emma Fitzsimmons, writing in NYT, “Putin Gets a Cool Reception From G-20,” (Nov. 15), illustrates the aforementioned “affirmative agenda,” i.e., here the demonization of Putin, with such items as Harper, Canadian PM, cordially greeting Putin’s approach, “I guess I’ll shake your hand, but I have only one thing to say to you: You need to get out of Ukraine.” Obama, to a Brisbane university audience, cordiality to a fault, “called Russia’s aggression against Ukraine a ‘threat to the world as we saw in the appalling shootdown of MH-17, a tragedy that took so many innocent lives, among them your fellow citizens.’” Abbott, Australian PM, not to be outdone, said he planned to “shirt-front” Putin (whether Australian football or rugby, pretty direct) at the meeting, and instead—though he told reporters, “I am going to be saying to Mr. Putin: Australians were murdered [MH-17]. They were murdered by Russian-backed rebels using Russian-supplied equipment. We are very unhappy about this”—they politely shook hands on stage. Perhaps Abbott got off lucky, not going Putin toe-to-toe!

Time for high comedy, were the facts not so tragic. Landler’s article, “Obama Moves Close to Calling Russian Action in Ukraine an Invasion,” (Nov. 16), describes Sunday’s Obama news conference, which followed Obama’s earlier warning to Putin in Beijing about continued sanctions “for actions in Ukraine that he edged close to calling an invasion,” and now said, in full POTUS majesty, America was “very firm on the need to uphold core international principles, and one of those principles is **YOU DON’T INVADE OTHER COUNTRIES.**” (My caps.) Like Iraq? Afghanistan? Airstrikes and drone assassinations in multiple countries?

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Finally, because Beijing and Brisbane are closely linked in American policymakers’ minds as a unified next step in implementing the global hegemonic framework, I turn back to China and Washington Post’s Steven Mufson, for his article, “China, the new indispensable nation?”, (Nov. 14), for additional coverage on the foreign-policy approach. In his case, his American-centered perspective enables Mufson to see clearly how Team Obama views China—short, that is, of frank acknowledgment of open hostility. China is to be confronted on tip-toe, at least until irreconcilable differences surface necessitating limited war. And then? In our time, there seems to be a logic to events, backed by nuclear arsenals. None of this last in Mufson, but that China is undeniably on America’s mind comes through. Madeleine Albright once said, “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation.” This in 1998, addressed to the use of

force in Iraq. Mufson, raising the obvious, in light of contemporary reality: “Maybe there are two indispensable nations.”

Yes, the national-security party line: “Now, however, while America still possesses unparalleled military superiority and bears a unique burden in intervening in foreign conflicts or humanitarian crises, [a voice of liberal burden-bearing via endemic interventionism—mine], China has grown into an indispensable nation on issues such as climate change, trade, and peace and stability in the Asian Pacific.” What the reporter does not admit is that the latter, peace and stability in the Asian Pacific, either represents the clash between two indispensables, or more likely, America reserves to itself the role of supervising and implementing regional peace and stability as a newly declared to-be-achieved sphere of influence. The US under Obama has resurrected the Open Door under very different global circumstances, less for the purposes of non-colonial imperialism, as in the latter 19th century, although market penetration is never far from mind, but imperialism at a higher stage which takes in world supremacy in all its regalia, armed force at the ready, aimed foremost at Russia and China as the currently perceived challengers.

The process described here is that of absorption into the American power orbit. China must learn to play by the rules, American style. As on climate change and trade, “China—the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, and the world’s largest or second-largest economy, depending on the method of measurement—must play an active role.” The rub—by whose definition of active role, responsible leadership, or other phrases suited to and generated from politicized content. Mufson continues: “But how will China play that role? No matter how much the United States urges China to take on new responsibilities, Washington still views China’s leadership with some unease. And China returns the favor.”

Fine, and to be expected, but he now gives away what I take to be the US thinking, the veiled threat implicit in the background should China refuse to knuckle under—or what we politely term, channeling its energies into American-defined ground rules, internal (non-socialist) and international (for starters, market fundamentalism): “For decades, the United States—regardless of which party or president has been in power—has tried to channel China into the safe, bland, bureaucratic uniformity of EXISTING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the U.N. Security Council.” (My caps.) The problem is, these institutions are anything but bland; they reflect a power relationship capped by US across-the-board dominance, without which America would experience drastic decline, saved, if at all, by pre-emptive nuclear war.

China and Russia’s compliance with the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and Security Council veto-at-the-ready, and myriad financial and other global arrangements, becomes the standard of international order, the departure from which is believed catastrophic and deserving of punishment. Indeed, Obama’s approach to China and Russia (and he, of course, is only code for the whole national-security, intelligence, military apparatus) is closer to traditional imperialism, World War I vintage, as marked by both his Pacific-first strategy and sanctions-regime against Russia, than—although still very much present—the program of selected intervention and covert operations for regime change. We are back in the Big Leagues with the present mode of confrontation. China is not Libya, nor Russia, Iraq.

I spoke of absorption; sublimation would also do, whatever it takes to deny and negate the autonomous development of political economies, cultures, etc. deemed suspicious by US standards. “The idea was,” Mufson perhaps innocently writes, “that as China played a larger role in such institutions, it would come to abide by the international rules of the road,” from safeguarding intellectual property to helping out in the Ebola epidemic, but in reality, not mentioned, complete subservience to the particular construction of world capitalism favored by America. I’ll give the next-to-last word to Robert Zoellick, who, in 2005, as deputy secretary of state, told the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations: “For the United States and the world, the essential question is: How will China use its influence? To answer that question, it is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China’s membership into the international system: We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder in that system.”

A responsible stakeholder: code for China as willing appendage of America’s political-economic outreach in the Pacific and adoring supplicant at its shrine of militarized capitalism. The last word—I accept. What we are witnessing, simultaneous pressure applied to China and Russia, has the unintentional consequence of drawing them together. Or perhaps, intentional, for drawing them together accords with an inner American ideological propulsion, bred in the bone (so to speak), of welcoming what I have termed the re-polarization of the world structure, the Cold War renewed, intensified, perpetuated, as the only psychologically satisfying recourse to feelings of security and wellness, Americans having been wholly habituated to war and conflict as the summum bonum of the moral life, Exceptionalism with a cherry on top.

NOVEMBER 19, 2014

### **Israel at the Moral Cross-Roads**

A tragedy, one of thousands that could have been averted: the killing by two Palestinians of four rabbis at morning prayer in a synagogue in Har Nof, a West Jerusalem ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, the two assailants in turn killed. Violence is contagious, endemic, even understandable, in the setting, but never exonerative—from whichever direction it comes. The problem is that precast judgment easily follows when the framework for assigning blame is skewed in favor of the strong, the powerful, the ones enjoying favor in the international community and, secondarily, having unlimited resources to present their case—regardless of merit. Short-term perspective, the event itself, works in favor of the dominant party; the longer-term perspective, lest it clutter a black-and-white interpretation, is viewed as devious and of no account. I do not plead for the justness of such an act as seen here, however extreme the persecutory forces presumed to have driven it. The four rabbis are indeed human, entitled to life and dignity, and, to the best of our knowledge, were not individually and directly involved in the repression of the Jamal cousins or other Palestinians.

But that is just it. The system is designedly one of repression. It is, beginning with Israel’s foundation period and statehood, if not actually before in the Yishuv, and even earlier, the politicization of Zionism as thought an exclusive refuge, necessitating, as if by divine right, the clearing away of all obstacles, be they human or material, to settlement. Repression: one-sided in origins, conception, implementation, supporting ideology, so categorically placed within the confines of Western society and civilization as to afford no opportunity to introduce a MORAL

CALCULUS by which to make sense of long-term conditions and consequences. Legitimacy, itself a function of power, creates and bestows morality on any set of actions its progenitors impose—obviously inadequate as a moral proposition because countenancing and encouraging sheer force (in its myriad guises) as determinative, and as well, perverse of democratic values and practices for that very reason: to the victor go the spoils, including moral reputation.

This is not David vs. Goliath, itself ironic because no longer recognizable to Israelis, but systemic violence practiced by one people over another. Barrington Moore (with whom I had the privilege to study within and beyond the classroom), in his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, developed the concept of “legitimized violence,” violence practiced in the name of law and order, violence sourced in the very workings of social structure, violence so commonplace as to become part of a self-justifying ideological explanation. Wherever dominant-subordinate, superior-inferior relationships exist, there legitimated violence is invoked, subsists, ultimately thrives. In practical (though disguised) terms, capitalism ordains rich and poor; strikers are struck down in the name of Order (too, civil-rights protesters); egregiously, the entire social structure promotes wealth-and-status differentiation, and with it, unemployment, penury, starvation, for large numbers, self-indulgent luxury, conspicuous consumption, power to be cruelly employed, for the few, all as part of the natural order of things.

In Israel-Palestine the situation is crystallized like few places on earth. The occupation takes the form of legitimized violence in every aspect of life, internally, for the Palestinians—in the fine-grained texture of daily existence (for those who remember, my words could have been that of Franz Fanon probing the darkness of colonialism) in which Palestinians are treated, and made to feel through every power of the state, checkpoints, permits, searches, house demolitions, as inferior (Golda Meir, using the Yiddish term, called them “schwarzes”), and externally, not only inferior, but prisoners, in a walled-up ghetto, subject to arbitrary arrest, blockade, deprivation of essentials, administered in the spirit of systemic punishment and arbitrariness. Spiteful, as a means of certifying strength. This does not excuse today’s horrible deed in Har Nof, but neither does it serve to obfuscate or excuse the past, as Netanyahu and probably all of Israel are busily doing, pulling out all the stops, in order to wreak vengeance on the Palestinians. Tallit and tefillin soaked in blood, the image presented everywhere, worldwide. As recently as weeks ago, there is no mention of the IDF having left Gaza in a state of rubble, shells and bombs killing hundreds, especially those seeking sanctuary in UN buildings, power outages while the gravely wounded in the hospital corridors cannot be attended to in the ER, medicines in short supply.

No, we must abandon the tit-for-tat schematization of Middle East violence, as though both sides were equally at fault, or, since the Palestinians, in isolated acts of terror, denied the advantage of legitimized violence, stand out as more conspicuous and flagrant, therefore appear entirely in the wrong. By my reckoning, the moral calculus reveals the opposite to be true: the institutionalization of violence and repression, exemplified in the always disproportionate application of force, convicts Israel as over the long-term bearing ultimate responsibility for what Palestinians seek to do in resistance or even revenge. That does not make it right. But neither can Israel plead victimhood, the injured party, oh, those rockets (literally a drop in the bucket, as casualties testify, the preponderant destructiveness coming from the Israeli side).

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Evil is a tall order; I do not wish to become involved in metaphysical disputes, but when a patina of glibness provides surface cover for deeply-layered self-righteousness in the Israeli psyche, little can be expected of moral awareness of the crimes committed against Palestinians in the name of a Biblically-ordained and –justified Greater Israel, the uprooting of an indigenous people, their lives, their lands, their identity. That, to me, is skirting around, if not touching the very core, of evil, here, the willful depersonalization of the Other, now denied humanness, a blank tableau on which to practice the cruel arts of degradation, humiliation, imposed subservience. Somewhat out of keeping for the generation which itself suffered the pain and anguish of the Holocaust, to create in its midst, or that of its sons and daughters, its own Holocaust—as if in retribution for the suffering of the past. The psychopathology of absolute denial has become rampant in Israel; only the Palestinians commit crimes—who we, wholly blameless and seeking only peace and security for our loved ones.

Listen to Netanyahu, as he, within hours, mobilized the machinery of repression with arrests, property destruction, incitement to further violence. He wasn't alone. I turn to New York Times reporters Jodi Rudoren and Isabel Kershner's article, "Four Rabbis Are Killed in Jerusalem Synagogue Attack," (Nov. 18), biased toward Israel, yet with evidence—for they are excellent reporters—that shows Israeli officials and the public drenched in self-righteousness (its corollary, the subhuman qualities of the Palestinians). Understandably, they say, "Witnesses and Israeli leaders were particularly horrified at the religious overtones of an attack on a synagogue that killed men in ritual garments and spilled blood on prayer books." I too would be horrified if that had taken place in our Saturday morning conservative minyan. Yet, "religious overtones," of course—just as ultra-Orthodox groups threaten to desecrate the precincts of Al Aqsa Mosque, etc.; more important is the contrived way the blood-imagery and ritual garments figure repeatedly in the Israeli narrative. They quote Yehuda Zahav, leader of a religious emergency response team: "To see Jews wearing tefillin and wrapped in the tallit lying in pools of blood, I wondered if I was imagining scenes from the Holocaust. It was a massacre of Jews at prayer."

Reverence, soul-searching, renewed efforts at a peaceful solution—that would validate the sentiment, a lamentation over profound defilement of innocent life and of the religion. Instead, words, as Netanyahu puts on battle dress and—the operative word, "incitement"—blames Abbas and Hamas for the attack ("the direct result of the incitement"), Kerry joining the chorus, holding Abbas responsible, stating "The Palestinian leadership must condemn this, and they must begin to take serious steps to restrain any kind of incitement that comes from their language, from other people's language, and exhibit the kind of leadership that is necessary to put this region on a different path." Abbas complied: "We condemn the killing of civilians from any side. We condemn the killings of worshippers at the synagogue in Jerusalem and condemn acts of violence no matter their source." (This last may have referred to violence-from-above, official violence, airstrikes, tanks, artillery, in Gaza.) The article continues: "Within two hours of the attack, scores of Israeli security forces had stormed Jabel Mukaber, the Palestinian neighborhood of East Jerusalem where those believed to have been the assailants lived, spraying tear gas at their family home and into the hills of olive trees. Relatives said the younger assailant's parents, three sisters and a brother were arrested, along with the wife, mother and five brothers of the older attacker, who had three children, ages 6, 5 and 3."

The moral cross-roads, continue repression, seek accommodation, the former paralysis, death, festering wounds, the latter, at least the start to crediting the humanity of one's fellow human

beings, and doing so, restore one's own badly tarnished humanity. Acknowledgment of the destruction Israel has wrought will probably never happen, the result being perpetual conflict and sybaritic fool's gold for one, misery no peoples should be forced to endure for the other. The moral calculus is badly out of kilter, oppressor triumphant, oppressed degraded. Perhaps only a drastic reworking of the world system, its thorough democratization, can right the sad state of affairs.

NOVEMBER 26, 2014

### **Spiritual Radicalization**

I know that I am consciously going against the ideological grain of contemporary radicalism. I do so, not to hurt the feelings of many I've known and the untold millions I shall never know, both of whom I regard as brothers-and-sisters in arms, at whatever age, joined together, embracing, in a common struggle for social justice—hence the least persons in the world to whom I wish to give offense. But hear me out, not as a cancerous worm gnawing away at the dedication to and sensibility of radicalism, but as one thinking out loud about the regrettable divergence between RACE and CLASS in modern America. A tall order, for a short essay, yet here goes.

I come to radicalism through two spiritual streams (first, let's try to define terms: by spiritual I mean, not sacred, ecclesiastical, religious, but rather the animating impulse or distilled essence helping to define a people—in this case, respectively, religion and race as unifying factors and summation of a whole historical experience), to wit, my Jewish religious ancestry and, difficult to explain, my early devotion to, appreciation of the suffering of, and love for, the Negro people. Yes, antennae go up, the outrageous “N” word, extreme discomfiture in radical ranks, nay, nowadays all ranks. But let's push forward, stay with me.

Age eleven: bedridden for two years, the first, in full body cast, throughout this time not precociously reading Marx but essentially living in a well-meaning vacuum, Board of Education teacher sent once a week for 1-2 hour lessons, table-model radio at bedside, listening to—whatever. Contrary to myth, this is not an ideal process of radicalization (my admiration for FDR for his ordeal with polio, yet perhaps making him more sensitive to human feelings but not issuing forth as blazing radicalism), and one that most radicals fortunately did not experience. However, something happens, intangible at best; a reaching out in imagination to all those afflicted, all those the victims of social injustice (as imagined here by an 11-13 year old), and, somehow, fixed on Negroes as the bearers of all the suffering society can manage to inflict on people.

The real breakthrough comes in the next stage, where personal struggle becomes (in the mind of the imaginative youngster) at one with social struggle: learning how to walk again, the messages, physical therapy, once again entering the world. Imagination is at one with the mock-heroic—forcing oneself on, in this case, living by a golf course, forcing oneself within a year-year and a half, to play 36 holes of golf several times a week, sometimes crawling home on hands and knees. You get the picture; no need to dwell further. But the interesting thing, again, not automatically following, is the deepening, the wanting to reach out, the desire to smash through the fraudulence of postwar flagrant consumption, the whirlwind of antiradicalism everywhere, already knee-deep in Cold War spreading virus of antilabor, antiradical suffocation. Probably my semiofficial baptism under fire was at 15 campaigning for Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party in 1948, an embarrassment to family, denunciation at school, the usual jostling at demonstrations.

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But do I digress? The main matter is Jews and Negroes, the growing fusion of identity in my mind, as the core, philosophical, political, emotional, of a meaningful, to me, radicalism, each reinforcing the other, because in fact, BOTH had become joined at the hip in progressive politics—and both today, I would argue, the thrust of this piece, having BETRAYED that earlier stream of conviction and action. A double loss, and America, insofar as its radical potential goes, never again the same. I am fortunate; I lived through the 1950s-60s, a high point of involvement in just causes—antiwar, antinuclear, labor rights, the toppling of segregation, both the Jewish and Negro communities, even regardless of class within each, enlisted in the struggle. As I've said on many occasions, Schwerner-Chaney-Goodman, murdered in Mississippi, together in fact and symbolically the merging of two great identities and heritages in the service of human welfare, Jewish, Negro, prime sources in the struggle for freedom, a freedom cast broadly to take in all God's children. I've stood with rabbis in all-night demonstrations in days preceding Selma. Rabbis, now? Most are too busy explaining away the rape of Gaza. I spent days and days on the civil rights front shoulder-to-shoulder with Negroes who were ALSO, as was Dr. King, involved in the protest against the Vietnam War.

No more. Blacks opposing Obama on drone assassination? opposing Obama on the murder of Iraqi children? On threats to world civilization with his steadily progressing confrontation with Russia and China? No, of course not. Black is black, black is beautiful, black is FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS, the colossal cop-out on anything that goes beyond racial self-interest. Example: Spring 1970, about the time we see both the Jewish and black communities in essence going over to the enemy, perhaps a lead-up in the late sixties with currents of chauvinistic embellishment of Israel and the same, Black Power (although hardly the same or together, a parallel surge of solipsistic grandeur sloughing off all previous dedication to human betterment for the one designated Good, as each saw it)—the scene, a campus-wide strike at my university protesting the mining of Haiphong Harbor and the killing of the Kent State students.

It was my privilege to be a leader of that strike, and, thousands crowded in the old auditorium, aware of the TOTALITY of the issues, war, civil rights, deprivation of rights and civil liberties, I unconsciously raised a fist proclaiming opposition to the totalitarianism of the American government and society, and looked out, all standing, clenched fists, in agreement—a sacred moment for me in the display of consciousness of authentic radicalism that I beheld. Then, I was followed by a black speaker. Why should I, he asked, support you? And for an agonizing time he went into exclusively black issues, ritualistic race-ennobling rhetoric, criticizing whites for showing concern for other than race issues. To hell with Vietnam protest, to hell with all that was going wrong over a whole spectrum of abuses—instead, race, race, race. It is out of contexts such as this, that we see the transmutation of Negro into Black. Not, of course, that one moment or place, but what I take to be the perversion of everything that Dr. King stood for, as in his articulation of the word “Negro” in his “I have a dream” speech, or as Paul Robeson, with every fiber of his being, stood for, in affirming the dignity and majesty of the Negro people.

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Simply, race in late 1960s America, displaced and replaced class, as though fulfilling the wish-list of every sophisticated racist and reactionary (for they go together) who recognized the social



dynamite of having class as an organizing principle of social protest and political consciousness. For that would mean, at the very least, an attack on social policies intended to rectify conditions of poverty and casting further afield policies favoring war, intervention, torture, humongous “defense” budgets, and, I believe, slowly but surely, questioning capitalism itself. Race smothered class in the popular imagination, and reduced blacks themselves to a pathetic political mass supporting the current administration on grounds of racial solidarity—an administration whose pro-war, pro-Wall Street, pro-surveillance settled course works to deny blacks themselves security, equality, and pride in the polity. The more under the spell of black-is-beautiful the more blacks are handcuffed, hooded, falsely charmed, self-handicapped and deluded in the struggle for freedom, a struggle which, to be successful, must leap over race in solidarity with ALL who oppose the corporate-militaristic framework of America’s global power, and its internal results, widening class differences, extreme wealth concentration, a cultural miasma of learned aggressive behavior.

Why bring this unpopular subject up now, when for a full half-century the practice has been to expunge Negro from the collective—as well as race—memory? Actually, I’ve wanted to for decades as I watched the deterioration of radicalism on all fronts take place, become both gentrified and politically correct, with the Negro-to-Black usage a prominent indicator of avoiding the criticism of, and opposition to, capitalism the perhaps ultimate consequence. Years ago, Oliver Cromwell Cox, a black sociologist, in *Race, Class, and Caste*, recognized the causal significance of capitalism in molding the institutions of racism. Like Dr. King and Paul Robeson, he did not fear the use of Negro, and I, here, as a lone voice in the wilderness, call for a return to Negro, shorn of the glamour and delights of fashionable usage, as a stark term of strength and pride to stand for SOCIAL CHANGE, to stand for emancipation and solidarity, in strict opposition to the contemporary Black Bourgeoisie, Obama, Holder, Rice, Jarrett, the in-crowd who, obliquely riding the wave of black power, have made themselves the agents of capitalist power—leaving most blacks far behind and below.

Skipping over the hyphenated African-American, and all the props to a diminished self-esteem, why not an affirmation, a truly rising chorus, of Negro, and to get at the full dimensions of culture, Negritude! Paul Robeson when I started to walk again gave me the courage to be. Straightforward honesty, pride, not as a cosmetic, balm, or p.r. stunt, but as HONORING a people’s history of oppression, of returning to the brave, the talented, the downtrodden, an internal fountain of self-directed power toward a future conscious of the transcendent issues and fighting alongside like-minded others in what shall always be humankind’s uphill battle against the forces of privilege.

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Still, why write now? A rather silly excuse, perhaps, but an op. ed. in the New York Times, Lori Tharps’s, “The Case for Black With a Capital B,” (Nov. 18), proved too tempting to overlook. Tharps, a journalism professor at Temple, has written a cogent defense of contemporary usage, raising the stakes from black to Black, as though permanently written in stone (until either African-American-Black or BLACK comes along—language, after all, is meant to keep up with the times). Not to forget my point, though, before proceeding, I believe—to speak perhaps too harshly—that race devours class, and spits it out, leaving blacks, except for a comprador-Quisling leadership, at the bottom of the social structure—and fodder for the war machine.

Tharps begins, having overheard “an exchange between a colleague and a student” over a paper: “‘Why did you capitalize black and white people?’ he asked. ‘I thought I’d seen it written that way before,’ she stammered. ‘Come on,’ he said. ‘Why should you capitalize black or white?’” Alarm bells went off. She continues: “The student didn’t have an answer. But I did, and it took a great deal of self-control to not insert myself into the conversation, because this is one of my greatest frustrations as a writer and a Black woman living in the United States.” Her point: “When speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalized. Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color.”

Would White with a capital W also do, and is lowercase white simply a color? How far shall we go in the business of self-gratification and appeasement of injured sensibilities? When I sent a manuscript to Rutgers Press, I could not use the terms “America” and “American”; instead, North America and North American. Even Emerson had to be upgraded to North American intellectual, lest—what? our Canadian neighbors might be offended? As for the African diaspora, can that be invoked as a global proposition to include, say, Brazil, and even if so, should that be determinative, emerging from the period of prehistory yet defining present-day race/ethnicity labels? Shall African-American and European-American (whites) become standard usage, and so on through the world catalogue of hyphenation? More important, why? To what end? Labels are a crutch, providing a false sense of self-esteem. But the genesis here I take to be one of fear on the part of the dominant groups of society, self-pacification to encourage assimilation, absorption, in African-American the second term is the more revealing, not African, but American, clasping the potential underclass of rebellion to the nation’s bosom.

A return to “Negro” would certainly clear the air, however painful kicking out the crutches would be—yes, everything from slave revolts to Harlem rent parties and Harlem itself, Negritude to navigate past the dominant culture rather than be subservient to and within it. Oh, those unfeeling publishers, etc.: “Linguists, academics and activists have been making this point for years, yet the publishing industry—our major newspapers, magazines and books—resist making this simple yet fundamental change.”

Tharps continues: “Ever since African people arrived in this country, we have had to fight for the right to a proper name. Upon arrival in the ‘New World’ we were all collectively deemed Africans, even though we came from different countries, cultures and tribes [yet no complaint over the evident stereotypy to this day—mine]. Very soon after, British colonists borrowed the Spanish term for black, and we became negros, negars, nigras and blacks—anything oppositional to the supposed purity of whiteness.” How, supposed purity, racial admixture historically having given rise to recognized gradations with the labels to follow (similarly, subsections of the African black population). No reason is offered for dismissing the historical experience of those, not alleged Toms, who wrote, worked, and fought within the context and usage of Negro, as W.E.B. Du Bois, who she notes demanded “that book publishers, newspaper editors and magazines capitalize the N in Negro when referring to Black people.” (She treats his title “The Souls of Black Folk” as indicative of his true intent, absurd from a reading of the works themselves.)

This was the dismal past. “But within a few more decades,” she writes, “Negro itself had become an unpopular term, associated with a subservient type of Black person, one whose politics were more about patience instead of protest.” Stop there. Why defame the social struggle which had long existed before the civil rights movement of the 1960s? And why not point out that afterward, the

struggle had gradually narrowed appreciably, divesting itself from issues of war, class domination, systemic causes of poverty, down to what may seem remote but a logical next step in the critique and analysis of capitalism (both absent from racial discussion), environmental degradation and related issues having significance for corporate aggrandizement and international politics? No, Stokely is hardly adequate to opposition to capitalism, nor Jesse either—yet Black, as an end in itself (so today we have a fascist-inclined Obama, great because himself black), Tharps nonetheless persisting: “The 1960s ushered in the Black power movement, inspiring a generation to claim that which had been demonized. In the late 1980s, Jesse Jackson pushed ‘African-American’ into common usage, offering a new term that wasn’t tainted by a racist history—and conferred the respect of indisputable capital letters.” And she closes: “Black should always be written with a capital B. We are indeed a people, a race, a tribe. It’s only correct.”

My thought: capitalization hardly substitutes for, and, I think, steers away from, equalization—a sop in the best tradition of cooptation and mass advertising. Let’s, then, peel away layers of liberalism and go down into the verbal trenches. Labels do not provide power, in this case, the reverse, the negation of class solidarity. “Black is beautiful”—sure, if you want to play into the hands of the American ruling class (African-American, even more so). What we are witnessing, over the last half-century, is the normalization of repression, here perfectly accommodated with/into the dominant culture. Perhaps a sense of GUILT is behind the whole verbal process, blacks skillfully playing the game, whites dutifully, if not pleasurably, submitting. (Guilt is the safety-valve of liberals and liberalism—but that’s a separate topic.) Lastly, I think guilt should be tossed back, that is, the sell-out of blacks in having retreated from a progressive historical role. When one measures the history of Negroes versus the history of blacks with a capital B, the sacrifice, torture, lynching, our criterion, it is the former we should honor, with capital N Negro, and ask Blacks, if they want the respect of all who want justice and equality to prevail, to ride Obama out of town on a rail.

NOVEMBER 28, 2014

### **Nazification of Israel**

Note: not, the Nazification of Judaism, my religion, that of my parents, ancestors, from the shtetlach of Russia, a religion I revere for its secular associations with struggle for the underdog, devotion to working people and the poor, emancipation of thought about/specific participation in the achievement of, racial equality; for its cultural associations with beauty in all its affirming-of-life qualities, whether in literature, philosophy, painting, especially for me, music; its religious associations with moral principles imparted by Torah, love of the stranger, implicit sharing of bounty, authenticity of mindset concerning devotion and faith. Also, not the Nazification of Zionism, for while I believe Zionism has proven to be a colonialist-imperialist ideology, that was not always the case, and in its earlier stages perhaps still in the Yishuv the manifestation of labor radicalism rooted in the kibbutz. But rather, the Nazification of Israel, which has, I believe, corrupted, shamed, distorted, betrayed Judaism in all its historical reaching heavenward in the praising of God and its secular and cultural aspirations to freedom and democracy, in contrast to Israel’s own militarization of religion through arrogance, hubris, superiority complex, leading to contemptuous disregard of all that stands in its way—even the kibbutz integrated into the security

system which feeds on population displacement and unimpeded fury directed to the Enemy, within as well as without.

Why the term “Nazification,” in the first place? The product of a self-hating Jew? Absolutistic defenders of Israel, who cannot, out of misguided loyalty, bring themselves even to denounce the recent atrocities in Gaza, may think so, regrettably including a preponderance of world Jewry especially in America today. As for Israelis themselves, opposition to ethnic cleansing, disproportionate application of force, second-class citizenship of Arab citizens, is near-nonexistent to dead on arrival. The Behemoth of the Middle East is taking on appropriate monolithic mental/ideological features of its own, so that internal critics, too, are seen as self-hating Jews. I have chosen the term “Nazification” deliberately because of what is currently going on, as stated in the New York Times heading for Isabel Kershner’s article, “Israel Cabinet Approves Nationality Bill,” (Nov. 24), the euphemism for the kind of Aryan laws seen in Germany at the advent of Hitler. This is troubling to say the least, a confirmation of what I have been suggesting all-along: The extreme pain and brutality of the Holocaust had become the seminal historical-psychological experience searing the Jewish mind as though a post-Apocalyptic barrenness had left Jews vulnerable to the psychodynamics of introjection—taking into oneself the mental framework and world view of the oppressor—under obviously dire conditions, and passed on as self-commending to future generations.

To this day, the cycle has not been broken, and indeed, it is replenished through “boots on the ground” savagery toward those pronounced weaker and inferior, the Palestinians. For it is they who have been rendered, a collective surrogate, as the Jews under Naziism, fulfilling the pathology of identification with the original captors. Liberation of this kind comes at the expense of the contrived scapegoat, and hence, not liberating at all but driving the mindset still deeper into the darkness of the horrific primal context of extermination. The cry of “Never Again” made sense, a sign of bravery, moral courage, consciousness of life from the profound depths of despair, but when the founding of Israel should have been the moment of supreme affirmation, the wound cankered rather than healed, the cry itself prostituted into a vehicle of unrestrained power and self-righteousness in the service of popular subjugation of those now made less fortunate.

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Let’s turn first to Kershner’s article; she begins: “The Israeli cabinet on Sunday [Nov. 23] approved contentious draft legislation that emphasizes Israel’s Jewish character above its democratic nature in a move that critics said could undermine the fragile relationship with the country’s Arab minority at a time of heightened tensions.” The assumption of Israel’s “democratic nature” we’ll leave moot—at least the reporter recognizes the Nationality Bill is separate from it. But the proposed legislation has been long in the making, opponents (thus far a decided minority—mine) “fear[ing] that any legislation that gives pre-eminence to Israel’s Jewishness could lead to an internal rift as well as damage Israel’s relations with Jews in other countries and with the country’s international allies.” In Cabinet, “the bill, a proposal for a basic law titled ‘Israel, the Nation-State of the Jewish people,’ passed 14 to 6,” with opposition from two centrist coalition partners. The Knesset still has to vote.

Netanyahu defended the legislation, claiming that he would amend it before the final vote to include the principle of “equal individual rights for every citizen,” vague and to me suspect,

because of the present situation, his track record, and the emphasis on “individual” rather than collective and communal rights. One critic, Ahmad Tibi, Arab member of the Knesset, sees “Jewish Democracy” as a contradiction in terms, “confirm[ing] that the Jewish and democratic state is fiction.” Kershner reports that preliminary drafts were “promoted as private initiatives by right-wing lawmakers,” which, among other things, had stripped Arabic of its status as an official language.

Yes, where this is heading is sending nervous ripples through the state, blatant discrimination feared not only tension-provoking but poor public relations that, according to Avinoam Bar-Yosef, of the Jewish People Policy Institute, “may stain Israel in the eyes of the free world and distance diaspora Jews who are counted as supporters of the Zionist project.” Netanyahu appears to remain firm, calling for new legislation that would revoke welfare benefits (and things unspecified) of those who throw stones and, presumably, their families. Lines already drawn with respect to Arab Israelis are further hardening. I give Netanyahu the last word in her dispatch: “There are many who are challenging Israel’s character as the national state of the Jewish people. The Palestinians refuse to recognize this, and there is also opposition from within.” Opposition, Arab Israelis but also miscreant Jews, now admittedly few, as the hatred of the many becomes self-devouring, placing the soul of Israel in jeopardy.

The Nationality Bill is still under the radar, but Peter Beaumont, of the Guardian, in his article, “Israeli Cabinet approves legislation defining nation-state of Jewish people,” (Nov. 23), fleshes out some details and implications of the measure, stating that cabinet approval comes “despite warnings that the move risks undermining the country’s democratic character,” particularly the definition of “reserved ‘national rights’ for Jews only” and not for Israel’s minorities. For as Beaumont writes, “The bill, which is intended to become part of Israel’s basic laws, would recognize Israel’s Jewish character, institutionalize Jewish law as an inspiration for legislation and delist Arabic as a second official language.” This last, of course, is intended to hurt, as though undermining the history-culture-identity of the Adversary, allowing then for impersonal treatment of the nameless—part of the salient trait of Israeli policy, deniability whenever convenient. Yet there is also the rough stuff: “In the West Bank, a Palestinian home was torched on Sunday [Nov. 23]. ‘The settlers came here and they hit the door, but I refused to open,’ said Huda Hamaiel, who owns the house. She said they then broke a terrace window and hurled a petrol bomb inside. ‘Death to Arabs’ and another slogan calling for revenge were also painted on the walls of Hamaiel’s home[.]” Whether the legal-constitutional or the storm-trooper mode of ensuring purity is worse, neither comports with pretensions of democracy.

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I use the term “Aryan” here not to call names, but in its generic sense of stating a hypothetical ethnic type, PURITY, whether pertaining to race, religion, nationality, whatever suits the historical-ideological purpose of the totalitarian society. Israel? In the Nationality legislation, ethnocentrism is inscribed in its very being, Jews as a New Pseudo-Gemeinschaft, drawing inward, known to itself by whom is excluded, expanding outward in a combative spirit as a means of demanding respect and flexing military muscle, from Jew to Israeli marking the journey to supermensch, disdainful of international obligation and world esteem. Curiously, conversion comes into play, Israel’s rabbinate setting conditions which ensure that purity-of-type, while busily tilting the society further to the Right in areas having little to do with religion. Perhaps my New York Times Comment to Shmuly

Yanklowitz's op. ed., "Judaism Must Embrace the Convert," (Nov. 24), himself an Orthodox rabbi who recognized the closed-nature of Israeli society, helps to extend my argument on Nazification (a term he would find abhorrent as applied to Israel):

Rabbi Yanklowitz's article is deeply moving, sensible in its own right, but also, although perhaps not intended, of great significance about the current state of world Jewry with respect to values of Torah and Jewish moral-ethical principles as they apply to the Palestinians. Welcoming the stranger does not have to apply only to the convert—it applies fundamentally to all human beings—welcome, as in social justice and respect accorded to others.

Judaism presently is afflicted with ethnocentrism, the we-they dichotomy, that prevents reaching out, the acknowledgment of what is HUMAN in others.

Yes, develop a more enlightened, kinder attitude toward conversion, but also, contemplate the recent destruction to Gaza, the baseness of the Occupation, the strangling of internal dissent in Israel.

Judaism is at a cross-roads, its spiritual essence of compassion, its centuries-old experience of discrimination and suffering, all evaporating before our eyes in the cruelty of oppression exhibited by modern-day Israel with the complicity and acquiescence of the world Jewish community. Conversion is a test of inclusiveness, of raising moral principles to the defining level of the faith; but so too is the Palestinian Question a test—are we, as Jews, going to replicate the behavior of those who condemned, beat, and murdered us, or are we going to live up to our finest professions of faith, yes, Rabbi, the passage on the stranger. No one is a stranger in God's sight.

DECEMBER 1, 2014

### **Europe Finding Its Moral Voice**

Palestinians have been the collective scapegoat for Israeli hubris. Zionism, once a progressive historical force for liberation of oppressed European Jewry, early revealed its potential for ethnic cleansing via the population displacement/forcible removal of an indigenous people standing in the way of the Colonialist Project. It did not have to be. Jewish suffering in the Holocaust (words are feeble markers, "suffering" not beginning to fathom the depths of unprecedented human agony and death inflicted on the Jewish people of Europe), justifying beyond peradventure the cry, "Never Again!," nonetheless perversely came to rationalize the practice, the conquest over others—the betrayal of Judaism's own centuries-old stand for human freedom, social justice, ethical principles of respect for others (the prototypic stranger who is to be welcomed at the gate). Zionism became the negation of its politically sublime self, the expression of yearning to be free somehow corrupted, turned sour, when opportunity followed for its nationalistic realization. The result: from Yishuv to ethnocentric-xenophobic-military State in less than a generation, growing increasingly hardened, crueller, bellicose by the decade.

One of the historical mysteries yet to be solved, if ever: a transmogrification of religious-and-secular soul into everyday stridently authoritarian moral abyss, where once both wisdom and heart

reigned supreme and together. Israel, more than the vulgarization, now the debasement, of Judaism, is recapitulating the vile practices intended to destroy the Jewish community of an earlier day, applied instead and directly to the Palestinian people totally overawed by and at the mercy of a grinding military machine which shows no mercy—no, not the ovens, not the “scientifically”-conducted genocide, that awaited themselves and was their fate under Naziism, but death by degree, by humiliation, by confinement (what, for example, is Gaza but a large concentration camp?), by the studied, predictable application of cruelty designed to break the will and somehow make the subject people vanish, go away, become (in the unguarded thoughts of Israeli leaders even going back as far as Ben-Gurion) liquidated. The distillation of pain is thrown over the wall—and yes, “Greater Israel” is nothing if not walls, and checkpoints, and armed guards, and security sweeps, and house demolitions, and, and...)—as a wholesale cleansing process in which the eradication of memories is gained through simple displacement on to the head of the Other, dehumanized so as to carry the burden of affliction hopefully without complaint. Here the rawness of colonialism gives to Israel a special chapter in the splendiferous history of imperialism and subjugation.

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Why now these bitter thoughts, especially from one who is Jewish himself? It should be obvious; I seek, as a lone voice, to wrest my beloved Judaism from the corruptive, despoiling hands of a nation which, as the self-proclaimed Jewish State, flaunts its power, its nuclear arsenal, its mighty air-naval-tank-artillery forces in the service of retrograde purposes, from internal regimentation to international Reaction, to, perhaps more egregious because more premeditated, the intimate details of subjugation and sadism as pressed down (or rained down) on a people whom from Day One could have been befriended through understanding rather than vilification, and through sharing power rather than insisting on domination. Instead, it has all been one-sided, a defilement of Torah for those who think religiously, a defilement of democracy for those who think secularly (like myself), in both cases, what would be a miniscule number in present-day Israel, where both Torah and democracy are invoked in the murder and rape of another people. How could any Jewish person exonerate such defilement?

I am stirred to write this morning, if the saturated shelling of Gaza (reminiscent of scenes in World War II against helpless villages) were not enough, the kill ratio in Israeli favor testifying to the disproportionate use of force as benchmark of aggressive intent to DECIMATE the Palestinians (a functional analogue of the gas chambers, albeit on a smaller scale), by a small but promising sign of retribution in the face of a standoffish world. I refer to the New York Times article by Steven Erlanger, “Europe Takes Stronger Measures, Albeit Symbolic, to Condemn Israeli Policies,” (Nov. 23), in which he states that “European nations, Israel’s largest trading partners and a historical bastion of support, are taking stronger measures to support Palestinian sovereignty and condemn what many see as aggressive, expansionist Israeli policies.” That hurts. America is in the bag. But Europe, trade, markets for Israeli arms and high-tech products, even, admiration for European culture, another story altogether, possibly—this train of thought mine, not Erlanger’s—enough to penetrate the hard shell of Israeli self-righteousness and open the way to self-criticism and doubt. Europe cannot be dismissed as a collection of self-hating Jews, allowing an elaborate psychological defense mechanism to remain rigidly in place. Europe holds up a mirror to Israel that America could not and would not, particularly American Jewry, enslaved to the connection with Israel, right or wrong, the latter never considered.

The ground is beginning to shake: “After years of mounting frustrations widely expressed but rarely acted on, politicians from Britain, France, Spain and Sweden have embraced symbolic steps to pressure Israel into a more accommodating stance toward the Palestinians.” I note, this is not Left criticism, and so, easily dismissed (as is the wont of Israel’s supporters in the rare instances when it arises), Britain particularly worrisome in this regard. Yet, two points stand out, a reiteration that this is only a symbolic stage for now and, he continues, is even-handed in that still taking a blame-both-sides position: “Last week, European Union foreign ministers issued a statement that condemned the growing violence in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, Israeli expropriation of land near Bethlehem in the West Bank, and plans for new settlement construction, and urged Israel to change its policy on Gaza. [Yet despite Israeli one-sided blameworthy conduct, the EU ministers’ backing off of a forthright indictment.] It ended with an unusual warning: ‘The future development of relations with both the Israeli and Palestinian partners will also depend on their engagement toward a lasting peace based on a two-state solution.’” At least the last is clear, legitimating the two-state solution in direct opposition to Israel’s wishes and conduct (but not its deceptive rhetoric of continued negotiation).

The four countries thus far are acting singly (if acting it be), the EU per se not officially engaged. Yet as one Israeli analyst, Dahlia Scheindlin, points out, “Israel is losing Europe on three levels”—shifting public opinion against Israel, EU’s growing concern about its presence in the West Bank, and, “most recently, the waves of parliamentary discussions and votes in favor of recognizing Palestinian statehood.” Too little I should think, because, as Erlanger states, these “statements and nonbinding votes... do not seem to have an immediate, tangible impact on Israel’s core political or economic interests. Israel continues to enjoy good diplomatic relations with the major European powers.” I sense temporizing if not outright stalemate, the glimmer of hope I mentioned: at least criticism is coming out in the open. He writes: “Yet the actions reflect surging antipathy in Europe’s public discourse that threatens to drown out residual support for the Jewish state.” Talk of sanctions if there is “no progress toward a two-state solution,” but on Israeli interests primarily in areas outside the ’67 boundaries. Even following along with Erlanger, in which he says, “the tone sharpened in response to the war in Gaza this summer and to continuing Israeli settlement expansion, which European leaders call illegal,” there is not a hint of withdrawing diplomatic recognition—at best still the kind of shilly-shallying that Israel can afford to dismiss, and indeed, thrives on, through demonstrating its contempt for all critics of its policies.

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What we see then is a ceremonial dance on the heads of Palestinians, EU diplomats swaying in the moonlight, troubled by “the one-state outcome, where Israel is heading fast,” but not sufficiently so to force Israel’s hand. The ties that bind are telling: “The European Union is Israel’s biggest trading partner, at nearly thirty billion euros (about \$37.4 billion) a year, and provides it with tariff-free access to the bloc’s 28 member states. For many European nations, Israel is an important partner in high technology, intelligence and defense, including arms purchases.” The cultural affinity flowing in both directions may give Israel pause about antagonizing Europe, but also keeps the EU somewhat on tenterhooks about the need for decisive action. This stand-off, Israelis more cautious in criticizing Europe than the US because of taking the latter for granted, an attitude we all know which is positively explosive, bordering on hate, when it comes to the UN, is itself, as European criticism grows, becoming for Israelis more transparent, i.e., contemptuous when



it comes to any criticism (the self-hating Jew, Exhibit #1), a situation that could ultimately backfire. Erlanger quotes Shlomo Avineri, of Hebrew University, unusually frank on this point: “There are people in the Israeli government for the first time who are messianic fanatics. They don’t care what the world thinks, either because they believe God is on their side, so who cares what Brussels thinks, or because they want Armageddon, after which all will be fine.” I could not say it better, and only add, its secularist equivalent with a strong quotient of militarism can also be found everywhere.

Of course, Israel has a ready answer to criticism of its treatment of the Palestinians and procrastination about moving to a two-state reality. The reporter has a good ear: “Israeli leaders reject much of the European criticism of their policies as betraying a deep bias or lack of understanding. [Why stop with Europe, although here his topic—the standard line repeated on any or all occasions.] It is Palestinian leaders, not Israelis, they say, who have declined to engage substantively in the peace process. They argue that radical Islamists among the Palestinians, including Hamas, conduct armed struggle and terrorist attacks against Israelis, leaving the country no choice but to take tough security measures. Some blame an increasingly organized and vocal subset of Muslims for the shifting opinions in Europe.” Everything is THEM, not US, opting for the explanation, “leaving the country no choice” on security (i.e., repression, occupation, rubber bullets, gas, prison, blockade, the stifling of economic development), as though no other path were possible. We need a new chapter in Torah: The inevitability of degradation. Maybe that would satisfy Israel.

It would not satisfy me. If one murders while wearing a yarmulke, that does not make the act clean in the sight of God. Why stop then, why hold back? Acting with impunity is the license afforded through certitude and self-righteousness. Avi Primor, head of European studies at Tel Aviv University and former ambassador to Germany and the EU, whom Erlanger quotes as acknowledging “the loss of European public opinion,” goes on to describe the resulting Israeli indifference—“so ‘it does not change anything for the government,’ which dismisses most criticism as anti-Semitic, and will not affect elections.” I do not know if Primor shares that view, but his further observation helps us to grasp the Israeli mindset on the brazen lack of concern: “Public opinion in Israel has learned that international criticism does not hurt us. Does this damage something? Bring sanctions? No. The dog barks and the caravan moves on.”

What better epitomizes the official and perhaps popular outlook? Well, there’s always Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who likens criticism of Israel and support for Palestinians to “Europe’s attitude toward Czechoslovakia in 1938,” and Economy Minister Naftali Bennett, who declares the Palestinian state “no longer realistic.” With Netanyahu, a magnificent triumvirate of peace and reconciliation that only world Jewry could love, so far has Judaism strayed from its sublime origins, ethical foundations, and humanistic practices. But hear Nigel Sheinwald, who had been British ambassador to the US and the EU. Erlanger describes him as having “recalled growing up Jewish in North London when Israel was revered as a plucky, brave outpost of the West that had arisen from the ashes of the Holocaust.” (Though the reference is to the Cold-War context, the brave outpost of the West, “plucky” fits my own memory of the late ‘forties, little did we know the population displacement going on.) Erlanger finishes the thought about being revered: “That image is long gone.” And Sheinwald, seeing the difference, yet believes only the present government is at fault (at least for him, someone is!): “The change from that high point to the levels of public antipathy toward Israel today is quite serious. The single thing that has changed perceptions of

Israel and increased the sense of frustration is simply the sense that this Israeli government, even more than its predecessors, has been averse to serious negotiations with the Palestinians.””

Whoa, sentiment for peace must not be allowed to get out of hand. Erlanger quotes Dore Gold, former Israeli ambassador to the UN and president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, who warns: “In general, these European initiatives don’t contribute to diplomacy, and strengthen the Palestinian proclivity for unilateralism, so it can have the exact opposite effect from what Europeans want.”” To work for peace stimulates the conditions for war. Shove your initiatives.... Israel may be right: war in its severest, most barbaric form, against a helpless people, is the best step toward peace. If you want to contribute to diplomacy, look the other way at our atrocities, no, praise us for quelling the Arab-Muslim will to carnage, terror, rapine, coming out of an inexhaustible, bottomless well of hatred. Do that, and all’s right with the world. I write these last sardonic lines with a cold shiver: The Orwellian-Voltairean curtain falls on an Israeli moral/mental vacuum of depraved nihilism fed on the utter despoilment of a people flesh of the same flesh blood of the same blood as fellow human beings, with learning, dreams, aspirations, children, the same intelligence, wide eyes, curly hair—all to be annihilated for the sake of a Nightmare of Perpetual Aggression.

DECEMBER 3, 2014

### **Russia, the West, and Gas Pipelines**

The US/EU discouragement of the South Stream project to supply natural gas to Western Europe is a prime example of rigid ideology gunning for confrontation no matter the cost, a permanent war mindset directed to Russia and China and broader militarization of power in perhaps intuitive recognition of the West’s own pending decline in face of its own cannibalistic, indeed self-devouring, mode of capitalism. In world history, the dissolution of American unilateral military-economic-political supremacy, and that of its tributaries (“friends and allies”) engrossed in wars of regime change and counterrevolution, as well as embarking on participation in the Grand Showdown with Adversaries, Putin and Li, to foster an ancien regime of advanced capitalism, US-defined and –sanctioned, in perpetuity. Sorry Obama, sorry Morgan Chase, Exxon Mobil, Monsanto, the whole kit and caboodle of corporate-financial America, intervention, sanctions, IMF/World Bank machinations, Pacific-first carrier battle groups, drone assassinations as a means of displaying American power and cynicism, won’t prevail in the long run. Even possibly, the next decade. For these are all stop-gap measures in postponing the inevitable, that others, beyond the West-centric global system, want and will gain a place in the sun. And I’m sorry to report, the New York Times cannot always have its way, sucking at the teat of American power.

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Ukraine is the Tonkin Gulf of an earlier day, the flimsy pretext for gearing up for battle, presently, economic, but, should NATO forces via Ukraine be stationed on the Russian border, Putin will be more than chagrined, and Li, the Great American Pivot placing a military concentration in the Far East, ditto. Only a declining Empire has dreams of suicidal intent, vindictively bringing everyone down with it, notably, our “partners” in Europe. And what better means of forcing the issue, than energy—oil, in traditional terms, now gas as well. Ideology has been raised a significant notch, from earlier Cold War anticommunist hysteria, to the vaguer, more

sinister, potentially more horrendous and encompassing Counter-Terrorism of today. Never mind ISIL, although that will do for starters; China and Russia lurk in the shadows, and North Korea, Cuba, and Venezuela can be counted on for raising the war temperature of the American public. But at this very moment, let's turn to pipelines, a presumed sign of Russian aggression. Russia is adopting the Turkish route to markets, enabling it to direct supplies around a hostile EU, and at the same time, ease age-old tensions with China by entering into contracts which supply that country as well.

Michael Birnbaum's Washington Post article, "Putin cancels new natural gas pipeline to Europe in a surprise move," (Dec. 2), captures the Cold War context of the decision, "a measure of the dramatically reshaped relations between Russia and the West," a move which, the reporter claims, "deprives the Kremlin of a tool that would have increased Russian political influence over southeastern Europe and detoured natural gas around Ukraine, leaving it more vulnerable to Russia." In a word, Putin's defeat, prompted by EU leaders who "intensified their opposition to the plans because of the grinding conflict in Ukraine." The defeat is problematic, here disguised as a Western victory; Russia's underwriting of the project, where it would take all the risks, clearly benefited Europe. Yet the concern was that for Russia to pursue "grand expensive infrastructure projects in Europe," as for example, sending large quantities of gas underneath the Black Sea, would give "political clout through energy supplies." Putin cancelled the project.

Putin, in his Ankara press conference with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, Dec. 1, responding to Western sanctions and hostility, particularly EU pressure on Bulgaria to prevent construction, seemed completely rational: "If Europe does not want to implement the project, then it won't be implemented. We will refocus our energy resources to other parts of the world. It would be ridiculous for us to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on the project, go all the way through the Black Sea and then stand in front of the Bulgarian border," only to find Bulgaria rejecting the project. For Russian leaders, "the new southern gas route to Europe would have shielded E.U. consumers from energy disputes between Ukraine and Russia." But no, anti-Russian politics triumphed. Instead of welcoming the opportunity for improved relations, Europe would continue business as usual. Western sanctions, Birnbaum observes, "made foreign investors wary of ties to major Russian state-owned companies, including Gazprom, the natural gas giant that was leading the effort to build the pipeline. Restrictions on long-term lending to major Russian banks have made it difficult for Russian companies to raise money for new projects." (Presumably, if Gazprom had invited in Exxon-Mobil, tensions would have been relaxed—mine.)

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If one compare the title of the Post's article with that of the New York Times, "In Diplomatic Defeat, Putin Diverts Pipeline to Turkey," (Dec. 2), the Post may be negative, but NYT goes overboard. Andrew Roth's vitriol, in his opening sentence, states: "President Vladimir V. Putin said Monday that he would scrap Russia's South Stream gas pipeline, a grandiose project that was once intended to establish the country's dominance in southeastern Europe but instead fell victim to Russia's increasingly toxic relationship with the West." He next not-subtly demonizes Putin (already now implied): "It was a rare diplomatic defeat for Mr. Putin, who said Russia would redirect the pipeline to Turkey. He painted the failure to build the pipeline as a loss for Europe and blamed Brussels for its intransigence." But of course the important point is not NYT bias, but the actual issues, including the developing context for heightening Cold War tensions. Roth sees the

decision as “a rare victory” for the EU and the Obama administration, finally overcoming their “largely impotent” condition following Russian aggression in Ukraine. (Impotence? Hardly, in light of the Ukrainian coup, NATO mobilization, tightening of already burdensome sanctions, etc.)

Ukraine was the stumbling block, accounting for “increased pressure from Europe against the pipeline,” antecedently, though, a rejection of Putin’s claim that “the \$22 billion South Stream project [was] a sound business move,” Washington and Brussels “dismiss[ing] it as a thinly veiled attempt by the Kremlin to cement its position as the dominant supplier in Europe”—in effect, a stealth attack on the West. Always the Other Guy benefits: “If there was one winner it was Turkey, which, along with China and other energy-hungry developing nations, has been exploiting the East-West rift to gain long-term energy supplies at bargain prices.” The reporter is, if anything, candid: “As the Ukraine crisis deepened, eventually developing into a Cold War-like standoff, the Western powers became determined to resist Mr. Putin’s aggressive policies at every turn. One such effort was the South Stream pipeline.”

Tacit admission (and I think correctly) that the West viewed energy as part of the larger confrontation, at one with the recognition that the global power structure, with the addition of China, was changing as the Russia-China rapprochement—precisely because, in part, of energy—was taking place. Still laboring under the idea of Russia’s pipeline defeat, Roth is perhaps unaware the opposite is happening, far more consequential in geopolitical terms: “The Ukraine conflict also helped turn Mr. Putin away from the West. He signed a major and long-delayed deal to provide gas to China and began seeking other, non-European markets for his oil and gas. This, too, made the pipeline more expendable.” Add to this the imputation of Putin the power-mad ruler of a Russia anxious to restore its bygone prestige, and you have the narrative complete: “The Russian president directs energy and pipeline strategy personally, as perhaps the major source of power he wields in the international arena.” As I note below, Putin’s point about EU pressure on Bulgaria to freeze construction, that it denies Bulgarians of “fees of up to \$500 million annually...[and deprives them] ‘of the opportunity to act as a sovereign state,’” elicits Roth’s jibe that Putin said that “with a rhetorical twist of the knife.”

My New York Times Comment on the Roth article, same date, follows:

What “Diplomatic Defeat”? How Putin’s decision can be construed as a defeat at the hands of the US/EU reveals an NYT deep bias against both Putin and Russia (Roth’s aside, “rhetorical twist of the knife,” should have been flagged as rancid hate-mongering, not the first for that reporter.) Try for once an objective appraisal. This route-shift will directly hurt Western Europe, encourage closer Sino-Russian relations, and increase Turkey’s role in the Middle East (to the obvious consternation of Israel—after the aid-altercation to Gaza).

If anything, Putin took the principled stand, as evident by the original route which, given the opposition, he was forced to change. I may sound bitter, but I think the US is steering toward a renewed Cold War under Obama, taking on Russia and China as putative interrelated THREATS. Ultimately, this will backfire, as the global geopolitical framework experiences a decentralization from US unilateral hegemony.

Europe will shiver. But The Times will gloat at what it takes as the West’s having given Putin a black eye. Meanwhile, both Russia and China are dramatically strengthening, not

only because of their respective internal development, but also US go-for-broke diplomatic/military shortsightedness.

By all means, Keystone uber alles, fracking and all.

DECEMBER 5, 2014

### **Social Pathology of Nihilism**

Jean-Paul Sartre had it right, or at least half-right, when in the closing years of the 1940s, the War over, the Holocaust stamped indelibly in the minds of that immediate generation (advantages of age: I have the period vividly in memory), he wrote the famous essay, “The Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” a classic in the literature of authoritarianism perhaps now all but forgotten. How can a Jewish nation be anti-Semitic? That’s just it, its exclusiveness—the pending Nationality Law, passed by the Cabinet, and now to be introduced in the Knesset—predicated on the exclusion of the Other as the means of affirming the self, represents the social pathology of nihilism (the cheapening of all life except that of its own; denial of the suffering and degradation caused the Other, in the name of its imagined superiority and closeness to God). Not mere exclusiveness, but politically-economically-militarily implemented exclusion, which necessarily carries the seeds of ethnocentrism, itself a central component of authoritarianism, if not indeed, a principal pathway to genocide. Thus far, ethnic cleansing, population displacement, forcible eviction, have not reached genocidal proportions; checkpoints, house searches, an overriding societal atmosphere of overlordship and armed intimidation presently will have to do.

By this I do not mean Jewish anti-Semitism (a disgraceful phenomenon of snobbishness, compared with the foregoing, quite superficial and harmless, probably replicated by many other groups, nationalities, religions) to which I and most other Jews have been exposed and with which we are all too familiar): the intra-communal social stratification graphically symbolized by “Our Crowd,” an upper stratum of wealth, polished in manner, haughty, eager to distance itself in America from Hester Street, the shtetl, the slum, the garment workers, a chapter beginning to close (hopefully) as modernization seemingly homogenizes the group experience. Snobbery is laughable—the country-club set and below that the foxy-loxy bunch, silver foxes and bagels and lox—but not dangerous; hurtful, for some, but not, as increasingly is the case of Israel, murderous in intent, as in house demolitions, round-ups, most recent, the sustained shelling of Gaza reducing it to a Wasteland. Snobbery is not on the same continuum as nationalistic/imperialistic superiority, energized by the deadening effect of a moral vacuum which, conveying impunity, licenses sadism. How many dead children does it take to penetrate Israel’s collective wall of defensiveness?

I turn to Sartre who described a psychological profile originally intended to expose the Nazi-like mindset still very much extant in a world which, having known fascism in the immediate past, has abstracted its essence, a more generalized authoritarianism, that he probably least intended to have applied to Jews themselves, having experienced among the greatest horrors in modern history known to humankind. But listen to the words, their generic value suitable to be fitting wherever appropriate, here, I believe, exemplified by Israel, not just because of the Nationality Law, or merciless destruction of Gaza, but going back decades, from assassinations by Mossad to invasions of refugee camps, from building a war machine and accompanying (how could it be otherwise?)

militarism of mind to the unlawful settlements making peace negotiations leading to a two-state solution and the ending of repression a solemn farce.

Sartre zeroes in on the fear of human possibility, on the ironclad grip on the present to prevent the broader (and more humanistic) currents of social change, on the fear of slipping from the perch of power, dominance over others, supermensch of today, when he says such individuals “are attracted to the durability of stone.” Soldiers, without hesitation, using live ammunition when facing stone-throwing children of the intifada, giant bulldozers leveling homes and even people, armed settlers, unrestrained, off on a binge of hatred. Impunity, but also certitude—Judea, Samaria, Greater Israel—OURS, whether by Biblical injunction or the raw use of power. Again, Sartre describing the mindset, “in which one never seeks but that which one has already found, in which one never becomes other than what one already was.” The description fits like a glove, what some may have noted as arrogance (hardly a dirty word in the Israeli lexicon, thence transvalued as adeptness at achieving security), but I find as the conspicuous absence of humility, that which is necessary for informing the moral sense. Superiority, a supercilious disregard for the rights of others, here, Palestinians, but actually, the world community itself whenever criticism is directed Israel’s way. Solipsism is bad enough when it afflicts the individual, but when it comes to define the conduct and beliefs of a nation, someone—preferably internal critics—had better speak up, lest it lead to self-destruction bringing the world down with it.

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Sartre draws closer to the mark, the philosopher as psychoanalyst. Defenders of Israel, pursuant to the “official” line handed down by Israeli propaganda, as if that were necessary given the alacrity with which the world (and not just the US) Jewish community, almost as though spontaneously, has echoed and re-echoed the charge, has as the definitive answer to Jewish criticism of Israel (itself becoming rarer) that of Jewish self-hatred. I beg to differ. True Jewish self-hatred cannot be found with the critic, but with Israel and the many in world Jewry who uncritically support it. Why? Because they cannot and will not affirm the beauty of Judaism itself, where family closeness would find abhorrent the killing, break-up, and imprisonment of members of Palestinian families, where Torah teaches kindness, understanding, and welcoming the stranger, not humiliating, torturing, debasing the stranger, where SHALOM means shalom, peace, not war, not aggression, not overawing others, nor enlisting on the side of Reaction and Counter-revolution both for its own sake (ideological propinquity) or simply to please America, where humility finds favor in the sight of God, not this mad ruthlessness, the exterminationist urge carried over from having internalized the crimes of the Nazis committed against the Jews ourselves. Introjection I’ve discussed before, but it was the very evil and severity of the Holocaust that poisoned the psychological wellspring of much Jewish defensiveness, so that the slogan “Never Again” has been turned on its head, to swallow the cruelty now practiced on the Other, the Palestinian, the Israeli Arab, whom next?

Sartre writes (and for “Jew” I would put “Self,” self as democratic human being, self as one finding inner sources of strength—not massing fire power, including nuclear weapons, as Fortress Israel—still capable of affirming life): “He [the anti-Semite] is a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews of course, but of himself, of his conscience, his freedom, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitude, of change, of society and the world; of everything except the Jews.” Of everything except the Jews—my translation, not of the passage, but present reality, the fear of the Israeli to be Jewish, Jewish as cosmopolitan, Jewish as radical, Jewish as embracing all the subjugated regardless of

color and religion, Jewish as I have known the antiwar and civil rights movements where Jews were not afraid to fight for principles, to work in solidarity with others, whose moral bearings were not yet diminished if not erased by McCarthyism and subsequent waves of anticommunism. To cover over the betrayal of the Jewish spirit, Israel, and world Jewry following along, finds refuge in strident assertion, force, the political-ideological shift Rightward. In Sartre's timeless declaration, "Anti-Semitism, in a word, is fear of man's fate. The Anti-Semite is the man who wants to be a pitiless stone, furious torrent, devastating lightening: in short, everything but a man." When I said at the beginning, "at least half-right," Sartre could not have known, but the superb characterization finds application in the most unlikely context: Israel.

DECEMBER 9, 2014

### **Eclipse of Enlightenment Values**

Torture is the deliberate infliction of pain. Its energizing factor is sadism. Legitimation of its practice reveals an authoritarian societal context of pathological hatred, of the self, others, the world, taking the form of domination, social and structural hierarchy, destructiveness—all as a one-sided power relation commissioned and conducted with impunity. It is the normalization of political bestiality sanctioned by State authority. Welcome to America, and its replicative extension, Israel, where, seemingly, anything goes in the name of Democracy, Freedom, and Security, the last-named the ace card justifying bending the definition of the other two to satisfy a heightened sense of national interest. I pair the US and Israel because at this moment both are engaged in a campaign of obfuscation and DENIAL when confronted by evidence of criminality, CIA waterboarding the functional analogue of Israeli shelling of civilian targets in Gaza, the two intertwined because drawing on the same inspiration—hegemony, for one, the globe, the other, the region, working in harmony and mutual reinforcement.

No, US black sites in Poland and other discreet venues, more open demonstration and advertisement of unexcelled cruelty in Guantanamo, Afghanistan, Iraq, employing the usual methods currently favored, e.g., solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, physical and psychological abuse, myriad techniques which reduce human dignity through humiliation, even together these do not begin to exhaust the meaning of torture. For the US, war, intervention, blockades, sanctions, employment of international organizations to soften the economic underbelly of countries to be economically/financially penetrated via austerity programs, trade agreements, currency manipulation, are ALSO torture, respectable, presumably legal, but nonetheless explicit modes of domination which, absent total denial, provide a reassuring measure of sadism, of inflicting harm, of demonstrating superiority. One does not rob another (whether or not at gunpoint) without feelings of satisfaction, the frosting on the cake of domination.

Simply, torture is a generic condition in the world of today. Israel, in recent times, is acknowledged as a past master of its practice. Again, no, not only the mass imprisonments, the fine-textured apparatus of humiliation, as in the appropriation of land for settlements, the checkpoints, patrols, walls, blockades, a pattern therefore of domination (to which the term "occupation" barely does justice), or even, forcible suppression of demonstrations in which children are frequently killed or maimed; what must be added is the organized violence, collective punishment of the Victim as the standardized way of keeping order. In a word, Gaza. It has become an open-air laboratory of

torture fueled by sadism, the knowing infliction of pain on the part of an anaesthetized Israeli populace wallowing like their American counterparts in their own hubristic righteousness and visions/aspirations of hegemony.

The functional analogue in the course embarked upon holds true, from stonewalling at the highest levels of government in order to cover up war crimes (Obama and Netanyahu, Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux, whatever their poor personal chemistry, pursuing identical paths, like the mythological pair, of taking the universe from both ends and squeezing hard to ensure maximum freedom of action in defining the goals of domestic order and military supremacy, for Israel, albeit, on a smaller scale under America's protective umbrella), to ensuring the basic thrust of their respective government policies will continue unimpeded, indeed, for that reason, exemption of justice, national and international, thereby earning still greater commendation from the people. Evil becomes self-reinforcing. In an earlier age, we called that guilt.

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A duopoly of evil? In fact, one does not have to go that far. To do so invites dismissal of the facts by those who refuse to recognize them and/or are in denial about what the record shows, a record that reeks of cover-up, promises of investigation which go nowhere, compilations so heavily redacted as to be meaningless, government running from accountability as though a species of treason, as meanwhile barbarism cum normality grinds on. Sen. Feinstein's Senate Committee, Israel's IDF Military Advocate General (MAG), each starring in its own Morality Play, Obama, Netanyahu, respectively, circus barkers for militarism looking on indulgently, the bread-and-circuses atmosphere of propaganda hype fending off indictment after indictment for, lest we forget our starting point, torture, as—if admitted at all—the overzealous attack on terrorism, the accidental misfiring on school grounds, in both cases, regrettable but necessary and hardly grounds for prosecution. When evil has government backing, and a complicit population backing the backing, it's not evil; just the opposite, the preservation of pristine democracy.

Let's begin with the US and the Senate Intelligence Committee probe of CIA interrogation practices, a report, despite Sen. Feinstein's flare up in March with the CIA for searching the Committee's computer network on the Senate floor, still has not been made available to the public—nearly nine months later. Talk about stalling, first, the chairperson's insufficient will, Feinstein the Mother Hen protecting the CIA, sitting on eggs that will never hatch in their fulsome horror, second, the CIA itself, America's favorite pet which can do no wrong, here skilled in-fighting to ensure an unblemished record of virtue (atrocities in view on the edges, enough to instill fear in its critics and PRIDE expressed in the nihilistic social base, in the full knowledge that force, terror, criminal instinct and energy are doing the people's work against the soft, the effete, the enemies of America), and finally, Obama and his national-security team, for whom power mixed with secrecy and a dollop of haute capitalism, spelled as American prestige, has an alchemic appeal, all of these are obstacles to the revelation of truth about terror. If the CIA were to fall, what of the entire paraphernalia of US imperialism, domestic surveillance, the gigantic defense industry, in sum, America's place in the world? Stand firm, guard the crown jewels, lest the dominoes start to fall.

Jason Leopold, reporting for Al Jazeera English (must be terrorist-linked, given the suspicious name, and hence untrustworthy!), in an article, "Revealed: Inside the Senate report on CIA



interrogations,” (March 18), has disclosed, from interviews with two Senate staffers, that the report, based on “the committee’s analysis of 6 million pages of classified records,” had been completed in 2012, of course classified, and that John Brennan, CIA Director, had presented a 120-page response of alleged flaws, also classified, in which Brennan argued that the committee “never should have seen documents assembled by former CIA Director Leon Panetta—which Panetta claims was not a review—because they contain sensitive material protected by executive privilege.” Executive privilege, like its companion, the Espionage Act (used by Obama directed against whistle-blowers), throws a curtain around the CIA and all wrongdoing of the United States Government. It all sounds so squeaky-clean: the agency’s rendition, detention, and interrogation program. One such detail, hopefully not to see the light of day if USG had its druthers, was a report to the committee by “former FBI agent Ali Soufan in early 2008,” who had “kept meticulous notes about the methods used by a psychologist under CIA contract to interrogate Abu Zubaydah at a CIA black site in Thailand,” notes conveniently lost for over a year, disappeared from the computers and finally surfacing, whether “turned over to committee investigators by the CIA or FBI or... in the cache of documents taken by investigators from the secure facility,”—a chief CIA complaint—never having been determined.

Leopold’s Al Jazeera English article, “Revealed: Senate report contains new details on CIA black sites,” (April 9), I insert parenthetically, because it has some details about Zubaydah’s interrogation torture, namely, that he was considered an “experiment” by Air Force psychologists James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, “subjected to all 10 torture techniques identified in an August 2002 Justice Department memo”—actually going “above and beyond the guidelines outlined in that memo and were used before the memo establishing their legality was written.” A case of bringing authorization into conformity with extreme practice. E.g., the memo allowed for Zubaydah’s sleep deprivation to last for “11 consecutive days”; Mitchell “kept him awake longer.... Abu Zubaydah was stripped naked, strapped into a chair and doused with cold water to keep him awake.” In addition, he “was stuffed into a pet crate (the type used to transport dogs on airplanes) over the course of two weeks and routinely passed out, was shackled by his wrists to the ceiling of his cell and subjected to an endless loop of loud music.” “[T]he music used to batter the detainee’s senses was by the Red Hot Chili Peppers.” No comment, other than the obvious: no wonder suppression, redaction, the whole ball of fascistic wax, techniques known through the chain of command (has the American Psychological Association, in passing, disciplined the torturers in its midst?) right up to the Executive Office—not much of a fit with the presumption for democracy.

Abu Zubaydah was presumed to be the first detainee subjected to CIA enhanced interrogation after 9/11, even though USG “confirmed he was never a member of Al-Qaeda.” Zubaydah made sketches depicting his torture. Panetta participated in the cover-up. The ball of obfuscation and denial gets off to a good start. Not to be outdone, the State Department gets into the act early, issuing a warning that by revealing foreign black sites American lives could be placed at risk. Executive privilege knows no limits. Josh Rogin, writing for The Daily Beast, the article, “Secret State Department Letter Warned: Don’t Release CIA Torture Report,” (April 4), note still early date, shows the unified, rigid, USG front when faced with exposure of aggression whether domestic or foreign. State’s contention is that “declassifying the [Senate Intelligence] report could endanger American lives abroad and harm relations with foreign countries.” Therefore, deep-six it, not, however, before hinting at its contents, in order to demonstrate USG’s powers of suppression and censorship (already evident time and again in the recourse to act with impunity in the exercise of

redaction). Here Obama is caught in a flat contradiction (betrayal?), first coming out for release of the report as testimony to government transparency, then quickly clamping down, what Rogin calls, “sending mixed signals on the release... for nearly a year,” the White House as of his writing wanting “to declassify portions of the 6,300-page document.”

Not good enough. In the conflict with Feinstein, CIA “will now be involved in reviewing and redacting any portions of the report that will be made public.” (It probably was, anyway.) The scare tactics of Senators Rubio and Risch, who voted against declassification, drew on the State Department classified letter, written by Philip Goldberg (June 2013), then the Department’s top intelligence official. There, he made clear a compelling reason for not declassifying the report, its “information about cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies and the existence of still-undisclosed CIA ‘black site’ prisons in foreign countries [Thailand, Lithuania, Romania, as well as Poland, for starters] where abuses may have occurred.” Silence is golden, if repression is to continue. Rogin quotes a senior Senate aide: “Embassies are concerned about their ability to contain the damage this release could do to their ability to work with the U.S. European countries already have a problem with American spying on them [reference to Snowden’s revelations], so something like this furthers the idea you can’t work with the U.S. in a clandestine manner without it being splashed in the newspapers at some point.” A classic falling-out among thieves, or rather, fellow-torturers.

The preceding discussion makes clear the restrictions placed on the report as or when it is presented to the American people. Coming up to speed, we see in Josh Rogin and Eli Lake’s Bloomberg View article, “Inside the Battle Over the CIA Torture Report,” (Dec. 3), that a declassified executive summary of the report will soon be released, to, I should add, my warranted skepticism. Even committee staff members protested the “hundreds of redactions the CIA had proposed,” and Sen. Feinstein, in proclaiming victory (the full report is presently nowhere in sight, one guesses still being gone over with a fine-tooth comb, so that little is left standing) has not much to show. Some redactions have been restored—but a pyrrhic victory at best. “Among the most significant of Feinstein’s victories,” they write, “the report will retain information on countries that aided the CIA program by hosting black sites or otherwise participating in the secret rendition of suspected terrorists. The countries will not be identified by name, but in other ways, such as code names like ‘Country A.’ This falls short of Feinstein’s original desire, which was to name the countries explicitly [of which I am doubtful], but represents a big victory for the committee nonetheless.” With victories like that, who needs defeats? (As illustration of her backsliding—mine, they point out: “In a victory for the CIA, Feinstein reluctantly agreed to allow the redactions of the pseudonyms of agency personnel mentioned in the report.” The pseudonyms, not even the names.

John Rizzo, acting general counsel of the CIA during the black-site period, hence one of my favorites in illustrating Agency thinking, emphasizes the vehement opposition on declassifying any information on overseas’ operations: “That was something we had fought for years and years.” Yes, CIA stonewalling goes back away. “Even referencing location” was thought dangerous, because “with other information” sites could be pinned down. At least, whether admitted or not, there was the intuitive recognition that black sites were scenes of torture and war crimes, else why the secrecy? A Republican staffer is quoted that “Feinstein’s office relented” on redactions “that could identify countries hosting the black sites.” Pseudonyms even for sites was greeted with alarm, layer-on-layer of untruth obviously needed to hide the truth. Here is Rizzo stating the applicable

principle: “Just because something is leaked doesn’t mean it’s still not secret. A national security secret is still a national security secret until the government says otherwise. So much for transparency (and for democracy—wise advice, no doubt, in Espionage Act prosecutions. Secrecy, often for its own sake, emerges as the false god Washington worships.

Best of all in registering the solemnity of the occasion, the occasion being the release of the executive summary of the report, redactions galore, is our noble, transparent president—never flippant when he discusses matters of state: “We tortured some folks. We did some things that are contrary to our values.” Ho-hum, let’s get on with the hit-list and armed drone assassination. We can forget the issue of declassification, though, the discussion turning now on whether enhanced interrogation techniques yielded valuable information, a nice way of avoiding issues having constitutional and international-law implications. But we’re not done yet (we’ll never be, as torture practices are integral to hegemony and administrations follow each other in cover-ups), Rogin continuing, for Bloomberg Views, his coverage, the article: “Kerry Puts Brakes on CIA Torture Report,” (Dec. 5). We tend to forget about Kerry in all of this, as though a craggy-headed model of New England integrity, when in reality America’s version of the Tony Blair lapdog—anything for seeming to share in power. Rogin reports, Kerry “personally phoned Dianne Feinstein... Friday morning [Dec. 5] to delay the imminent release of her committee’s report,” because it could complicate relations with other powers. Stiff backbone, he: “Kerry told Feinstein he still supports releasing the report, just not right now.” (Talk of cover-up, Nixon/Watergate is kindergarten play compared with this bunch—again, mine.)

Kerry, according to an administration official, had to raise the issue of timing “because a lot is going on in the world—including parts of the world particularly implicated—and wanting to make sure foreign policy implications were being appropriately factored into timing. He had a responsibility to do so because this isn’t just an intel issue—it’s a foreign policy issue.” Exactly, and there, even more than with intelligence, which has a license to graze the truth, anything goes. Meanwhile, Feinstein is left squirming, her reputation for integrity at stake, and that of her staff, which “just completed a grueling months-long negotiation with the CIA over what details would make it to the final release,” negotiations personally mediated by McDonough, Obama’s chief of staff, himself obviously privy to what transpired. Rogin notes that for the community of NGOs and human rights groups “that have been fighting for the release [themselves, I might add, both conceding far too much], the administration’s action is a betrayal, and also a sign that the whole issue has been poorly managed.” The last is a cop-out, poor management the case, not power, not ideology, not military planning, not the social structure of advanced capitalism.

Postscript: Peter Baker’s New York Times article, “Bush and C.I.A. Ex-Officials Rebut Torture Report,” (Dec. 8), shows the orchestrated refutation, prior to release of the executive summary, is in full-swing, a collective wall of defense (the recurring phrase, we’re not going to throw the CIA to the wolves) which is reminiscent of post-World War II Nazis’ whitewashing of their record. Interestingly, Michael Hayden, a former CIA Director, is quoted as saying [email to Baker, Dec. 7], “We’re not here to defend torture. We’re here to defend history.” Of course, defending the latter requires denying the former, itself, in light of the record, a form of defense. Everywhere, feathers are ruffling (Baker the consummate insider has a privileged ear), so that, e.g., Jose Rodriguez, who ran the CIA interrogation program, could give the classic Eichmann defense for his—and others’—actions: “We did what we were asked to do, we did what we were assured was legal, and we know

our actions were effective.” Immoral on the first two, dead wrong on the third. I give the final word to one former official: “We’re going to want to stand behind these guys.” And so, Sunday’s talk shows [Dec. 7] were buzzing with activity, from Hayden to Mike Roger, chair of House Intelligence. The fix is on, and when push comes to shove, this will become a bipartisan show, not just Bushies, with Obama himself signaling support for the CIA.

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Finally, a very brief look at the Israelis (as space allows) for what I termed above the functional analogue of deceit, cover-up, denial, perhaps common practice to all authoritarian regimes. The last, too strong? Let Gaza and the proposed Nationality Law answer for me. First, some background, starting with Isabel Kershner’s article in *The Times*, “Israel Braces for War Crimes Inquiries on Gaza,” (Aug. 14), which points to Israel’s hard-nosed attitude toward the commission of its own atrocities. Post-Gaza, as “attention has already shifted to the legal battlefield as Israel gears up to defend itself against international allegations of possible war crimes,” we see Israel’s “excoriat[ion]” of the UN Human Rights Council for appointing William Schabas, “a Canadian expert in international law,” for conducting its inquiry into Israel’s military role in Gaza. Schabas, two years before, stated that Netanyahu was his “favorite” to be in the dock at the International Criminal Court, to which Netanyahu, at the time of Kershner’s writing, replied, “The report of this committee has already been written. They have nothing to look for here. They should visit Damascus, Baghdad and Tripoli.” Typical displacement of the argument. Schabas, for his part, rejected the idea that he was “anti-Israeli,” having “lectured in Israel often and was on the board of the *Israel Law Review*.” He observed, “I don’t think everyone in Israel agrees. I would fit in well there.” Wouldst that were so!

The issue of war crimes Kershner faces honestly: “The broader struggle will be over what some experts describe as Israel’s ‘creative’ interpretation of international law for dealing with asymmetric warfare in an urban environment.” At the time of writing, “more than 1,900 Palestinians were killed in the recent fighting, a majority of them believed to be civilians, while on the Israeli side 64 soldiers and three civilians were killed.” I’ve discussed some of the criminal acts previously, the writer herself noting the “several deadly Israeli strikes at or near United Nations schools in Gaza where thousands of civilians were taking refuge,” as well as “the Israeli military policy of bombing family homes it said were being used by Hamas operatives or other groups,” one such case being the “July 13 airstrike on a home that killed 18 members of the Batsh family and severely wounded Tayseer al-Batsh, the Hamas police chief in Gaza.” B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, said “the practice [quite widespread—mine] violated the international legal principles of distinction and proportionality [translated: indiscriminate bombing and overkill], calling into question the clear military nature of the targets and whether the military gains were significant enough to justify the deaths of civilians.”

Like the US, however, the wheels of exoneration grind on. Kershner writes that Eran Shamir-Borer of MAG is already on the job of investigation. He offered, “the planned bombing of homes was reviewed house by house, based on intelligence and other considerations”—but the policy of bombing was not. And from there I turn to Jodi Rudoren, whose *Times* article, “Amnesty International Says Israel Showed ‘Callous Indifference’ in Gaza,” (Nov. 4), moves us forward. Callous Indifference refers to the airstrikes “on homes that felled entire families.” Amnesty criticized Hamas for the indiscriminate firing of rockets and mortar rounds, but most of its report

was “devoted to eyewitness testimony and expert analysis of weaponry in eight Israeli attacks that killed 104 people, 59 of them under 18.” Evidence of military targets was found in four cases, yet the attacks were ‘grossly disproportionate.’” Casualties included those fleeing, staying with relatives, because UN shelters were full. Again, the Israeli military promised an investigation, the foreign office stating—off to a good start—that the report ““accuses Israel of wrongdoing while producing no evidence,”” as though bombed homes and civilian casualty rates were not evidence. Indeed, the statement from Israel’s embassy in London, where the report was issued, asserted, ““Amnesty serves as a propaganda tool for Hamas and other terror groups.”” Rudoren brings us up to date: “During the 50-day war, six civilians, including a 4-year-old boy, were killed on the Israeli side, along with 67 soldiers. Nearly 2,200 Palestinians, including more than 500 children, were killed in Gaza, according to the United Nations; some 100,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed.”

Khalid Abed Hassan Ammar, a doctor, said, of the airstrike July 20 on his home in Gaza City: “We couldn’t hear the kids, their voices had completely gone—that’s when I realized they were all dead. I only recognized Ibrahim, my eldest child, when I saw his leg and the shoes he was wearing. I had bought them for him two days before.” Israel did not allow Amnesty personnel into Gaza, and had to rely on “two fieldworkers who visited the site of each bombing multiple times. Military experts enlisted by Amnesty reviewed photographs and videos from the sites... and surmised that 1- and 2-ton bombs were used.” Principles of distinction and proportionality be damned. Israel promises to investigate. Earlier, Isabel Kershner, in her Times article, “Israel, Facing Criticism, to Investigate Possible Military Misconduct in Gaza,” (Sept. 10), gives us grounds for hope (?) about “the military’s ability to investigate itself,” when she writes: “After the 2008-9 war in Gaza, in which up to 1,400 Palestinians were killed, more than 50 cases out of 400 that were examined were referred to the military police for criminal investigation. Three investigations ended with indictments... the harshest sentence [being] given to a soldier who had stolen a credit card.” Dr. Ammar, my heart grieves for you and your family. Justice is a stranger in the land, nay, not a stranger, but the Enemy.

Finally, Rudoren in The Times, her article, “Facing Rights Accusations, Israel Opens Gaza Inquiries,” (Dec. 7), both a step forward and backward, the latter given her favorable treatment of Israeli sources, such as, another favorite, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, military spokesman, who said, to no apparent discomfiture of the reporter, despite her recording of atrocities: “Even in the fog of war, there are things that we expect ourselves to abide by. It’s important to see that we are looking at these exceptional incidents with a magnifying glass.” That he calls them “exceptional” already prejudices the judicial effort, as does the reference to a magnifying glass, to see, for example, what Rudoren writes, “the July 20 bombing of the Abu Jama family home in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis... [in which] 25 members of the family, 19 of them children, were killed by an airstrike that flattened the three-story building.” Rationale (loaded language and all): “A member of the armed wing of Hamas, the Islamist movement that dominates Gaza, was nearby and was also killed.” Other investigations pending include “the deaths of two Palestinian ambulance drivers killed in separate episodes by Israeli fire” and “four cases of reported looting of abandoned homes in Khan Younis,” but the significant point, aside from whether convictions would be secured there, is the score sheet, each case dealing with a major war crime. She writes: “But the 21-page report also said no wrongdoing had been found in seven cases, including strikes on two hospitals, an ambulance, a clinic for the disabled, a Red Crescent station and a United Nations office.” Bomb

hospitals; don't steal credit cards. As Sarit Michaeli of B'tselem observed, "focus on specific cases can distract from bigger-picture questions about Israel's prosecution of a war that killed nearly 2,200 people and destroyed thousands of homes in Gaza." Too, bigger-picture questions are not wanted in America, including the very existence of CIA, NSA, and the thirst for international power.

DECEMBER 11, 2014

### **Torture and America**

When will America be cleansed of its fascistic rot? Never, because its institutional core not only protects but generates this rot. The rot? Today, revelations of torture, but torture is merely the excremental if not also logical product of a structural-historical nightmare long in the making. It would be fashionable to pin the blame on capitalism, but this is capitalism in extremis, capitalism beyond its recognizable path of imperialism, alienation, workers' exploitation, and widening class differentiation in wealth and power. Structural-economic concentration does not reach at some stage a magical tipping point, a qualitative shift to full-blown fascist social organization, tempting as such analysis may be in light of the German and Italian experience of business monopolization and the regimentation of the labor force preparatory to nationalistic expansion. For the US, that already goes without saying. No-one has twisted America's arm, however, to assume a global counterrevolutionary role under democratic guise. Its democracy is an ideological front, not for commercial penetration or control over the international financial system alone—although that too has occurred—the former under the Open Door of the late 19th century to the present, the latter since World War II as architect and leading member of the IMF and World Bank—but for a self-justifying, never sated, desire for world supremacy as insurance policy for not sinking backward into the morass of everyday humane relations, transcending class and race, at home, and the autarkic spirit of contemptuous unilateralism, at the expense of international organization, abroad.

Here is a Torture Report, very late in coming, lacerated beyond credulity, in which the injured parties are not the detainees—what, 119, when even in the last two decades the rubble of American bombing in the world has buried a thousand times that number, while Special Ops forces have conducted their own parallel campaign of torture—but the CIA itself and the US political leadership which has smothered it with affection. Lift the redactions, and you still do not get the story, torture as SYSTEMIC to America's global conduct and ambitions. The report, as written, ironically results in the exoneration of the (war) criminals, rather than leading to their prosecution. But how can a nation prosecute two presidents, a big chunk of the Pentagon, the disseminators of government propaganda in the media, including the press, service members in the field and their psychologist-counterparts who appear to relish squeezing the life out of fellow human beings or delivering excruciating pain to them, or waken the larger populace to the enormity of the crimes committed in their name?

Torture reveal America as a total package of hate, fearful of getting caught with its fingers in the cookie jar; if not, why the quick sleight-of-hand switch from the deeds to whether they were effective, in which case everything is okay. NBC, CBS, more attention to the supposed rebuttal than to the report itself, a gratuitous admission of "some mistakes," but the most brazen denial seen since Nuremburg. Tenet, Bush, Cheney, Hayden, Brennan, all virtue incarnate, yet the report stops at the

water's edge, Obama, his military and intelligence communities, his refusal to prosecute his predecessors (yeah, we did some dumb things), his assurances that rendition, etc., have stopped, his still-rampaging foreign intervention, enough to make P.T. Barnum admit defeat in selling bunkum and run for cover.

What then has perverted capitalism in America to make it outshine and outdistance its already baser self as a political economy? I wish I knew. Marx is an important guide, up to a point—but this cancerous disdain for humanity, this de-valuing of human life, this easy slipping into the use of massive lethal force at the slightest provocation, or none at all, suggest a groundswell of inner destructiveness, a striking out at The Enemy, a morbidity of discontent, all perhaps in the dark realization that democracy requires an unacceptable standard of respect, equality, commonality of perseverance in making it work, that has no relation to the reality of what America has become. Racism, ingrained as ever. Fear, pervasive, nagging, readily manipulated, like the Damoclean sword hanging over us, in the form always of warnings coming out of Congress, the media, the defense lobbyists, the White House—counterterrorism the latest glue holding society together. Citizenship = solidarity = conformity = regimentation = massive surveillance. The chain of self-imposed “soft” repression is without end.

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Three little words—enhanced interrogation techniques—worthy of the slickest advertising firm, were there not already experts in deceit in government itself, transform the fiction of a Mel Brooks-like movie on the Inquisition into the reality of a government authorized institutionalization of sadism, lost in the fastness of the long-mobilized National Security State, where friendly legal opinion from the Department of Justice to CIA legal staff to complicit legal opinion in other agencies in a widely ramifying network (of course supported by members of leading law faculties) give prior authorization for the legality of torture in its most brutal forms. We were only doing what the law said we could, the popular refrain before the report and repeated on its release and after. The Law is a mere convenience working to opposite effect, if anything, goading to blatant illegality. Not only were detainees tortured, America was tortured, there being one difference: the latter was done willingly. And if phrases justifying war crimes was not enough, we learn of CIA active cultivation of the media (hi, Tom Brokaw) to pass on classified information which was tailored to extol illegal practices. CIA, defender of the Homeland, worthy servants of democracy, not, as has been true from its inception, an inner Fifth Column intended to destroy American freedom.

Americans are afraid, as much, though we will not admit it, of our CIA, our FBI, our Military, who might turn on us—the concentration camp, assassination, or just ruined reputations (as under McCarthyism)—as we are of the International Threats we conjure up, ISIL now almost nudging aside Russia and China in the contrived/manufactured public imagination. Sacred cows are devouring our green pastures. The essential bipartisan continuity of public policy, in which Obama is as much a war criminal for refusing to prosecute (as demanded by the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on Torture) the war crimes of our own officials and armed forces, is itself giving way, as seen in Republican criticisms of the report, to a still shriller consensus—still remaining bipartisan—around Patriotic America, the old Nazi “stab-in-the-back” argument turned on any and all who do not toe the mark. Absent prosecutions, dissolution of the CIA, a sharp reduction of military spending, America stands before the world for what it is, 21st century fascism sprinkled with liberal glitter to appease a conscience which wouldn't know the difference.

DECEMBER 12, 2014

## **Butchers of Langley**

The rotten, ugly dirt is beginning to come out of the Senate Report on Torture. I commend to CP readers the New York Times article by Matt Apuzzo and James Risen, “C.I.A. First Planned Jails Abiding by U.S. Standards,” (Dec. 11), not, as the title suggests, to play games of “what if?”—as though a lawful option were ever seriously entertained by the powers that be—but, and Apuzzo-Risen don’t explain the switch, the horrific course embarked on, sans scruples, hesitations: a course of methodical barbarism, sadism devoid of human standards of law, decency, the most elemental notions of right and wrong. We stand condemned as a nation, vile, unclean, for the defilement of human rights, putting Constitution, legal and political institutions, the very idea of democracy into question. A just society does not torture. A just society does not have an internal agency committed to subverting the foundation stones of a free society. A just society does not elect presidents whose statesmanship lies in grazing the truth and in sweeping atrocities, which they authorize, under the rug. Eichmann would have been an admired figure in today’s Washington.

Their article is but a square inch in the vast field of depredation, most of which we will never learn about because of extensive redactions in the summary, the unlikelihood the full report ever becoming known, and beyond this, the obvious limits raised by a Senate Committee under Feinstein that, sympathetic to the CIA, never intended full revelation, and the CIA itself, destroying incriminating records right and left, sanitizing its performance, obstructing all knowledge as to its inner workings. But in a totalitarian order, be thankful for whatever scraps we get. Totalitarian? What democracy would tolerate the existence of the CIA? (Even Brazil is now going through the anguish of a Truth Commission dealing with the atrocities committed by its military dictatorship—something we shall never see in America, the Truth Commission, not, I suspect, the latter.) In America, we start with a supposed tabula rasa, pristine Innocence marking the national character, self-righteousness carried to unprecedented lengths. The reality? Let’s look at the article.

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The reporters begin: Six days after Sept. 11, Bush signed a secret order giving the CIA “the power to capture and imprison terrorists with Al Qaeda,” but not explicit instructions about their detention and questioning. This last is the present loophole (whether Apuzzo and Risen realize) for the CIA to claim now (we hear it constantly in the full-court apologia) that, new to the experience of interrogation, the agency had to improvise, working with no guidance—as though this explains or justifies what followed, torture, black sites, mammoth cover-up, putting further juice into the process of rendition, detention, interrogation. Poor innocent CIA feeling its way into unknown territory, which is the disturbing aspect of the article’s lead; for if an alternative was ever seriously considered, it was remarkably short-lived. Major decisions require explanation; none is offered. Still, the article is dynamite.

Too, most obviously, Smoldering Ground Zero legitimized everything, the torture program, but also the invasion of Afghanistan, the NSA construction of massive surveillance, America presumed to be on a permanent war-footing. Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld took the ball and ran down the field. CIA officials, the smoldering rubble, “scrambled to fill in the blanks left by the president’s order. Initially, agency officials considered a path very different from the one ultimately followed [according to the Senate Report]. They envisioned a system in which detainees would be offered the



same rights and protections as inmates held in federal or American military prisons. Conditions at these new overseas prisons would be comparable to those at maximum-security facilities in the United States. Interrogations were to be conducted in accordance with the United States Army Field Manual, which prohibits coerced, painful questioning.” (Trumpets sounding, followed by strings)

I dwell on this because it is still more incriminating of US policy and behavior than if CIA et. al. actually went directly into the Program without fanfare. (Et. al., from Bush and the Inner Circle on down, for this was never an exclusive CIA show.) The glimmer of understanding, then casting it overboard shows premeditation, the making of CHOICES, the head-on pursuit of secrecy, cruelty, or if you like, utter depravity. Call in the psychologists. Devise, beyond waterboarding, a menu of guaranteed suffering. Practice on humans experiments in spirit and kind to that at which Nazi scientists excelled. Explore the frontiers of pain. I admire the reporting, but again, no explanation: “The C.I.A.’s early framework [read, at most two months] for its detention program offers a glimpse of a possible alternative history. As the country grapples with new disclosures about the program, the Senate report tells a story of how plans for American-style jails were replaced with so-called ‘black sites,’ where some prisoners were chained to walls and forgotten, froze to death on concrete floors and were waterboarded until they lost consciousness.” (Significantly, details of this kind often escaped redaction, as though CIA was proud of its inhumanity, while anything touching on the identity of the sites or the personnel, even pseudonyms used to hide these identities, were ruthlessly scrubbed. As for personnel, in particular, accountability was never quite in its lexicon.)

So, Bush’s Sept. 17, 2001 catch-and-detain order “set off a flurry of planning” at Langley, with Cofer Black’s [CIA counterterrorism head] memo, “Approval to Establish a Detention Facility for Terrorists,” a starting point and basis for discussion. Black, no softie, wanted detainees placed on US military bases overseas, which “would have subjected the prisons to traditional rules.” Rumsfeld said no, and so the search was on for black sites. The turn toward hell was made, no opposition to my knowledge recorded. The CIA handbook stated the agency “did not engage in ‘torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment, or prolonged detention without charges or trial.’” Amen. Every one of these was up-ended in short order, the reporters write (again from a careful reading of the Senate Report): “But agency lawyers also began exploring a different approach, **THOUGH IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY** [my caps.]. A Nov. 26, 2001, draft memo lists several tactics—extreme cold, sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, and humiliation—and began discussing possible legal justifications.” Precisely this opportunistic use of the law, Pentagon, DOJ, CIA lawyers playing catch-up, fitting the law to the torture, legitimizing what had before been repudiated as torture, is a notable accompaniment to the practices followed. As the writers note, “Such measures [extreme cold, etc.] are prohibited in federal and military prisons.”

Go overseas. Maintain secrecy. Create and build the dystopian prison system of your own choosing, away from the prying eyes of civilization—although few were actively looking. Talk of gulags! Where is the American Solzhenitsyn, when we need him most? Instead, monster propagandists justifying torture in exquisite detail. Instead, further, Drs. Mitchell and Jessen, psychologists, specialists in breaking down subjects’ resistance in interrogation, the company they formed “ultimately would be paid \$81 million and revolutionize the agency’s approach toward detention and interrogation....” Here the capture of Abu Zubaydah (see my article, “Torture and America,” CP, Dec. 10, for additional context) in Pakistan gets the Program off to a solid start, alleged confusion about how and where to begin now dispensed with—this, March 2002; and the

reporters say that after six-months' delay, "the United States finally faced a choice." Not quite the choice one imagines, but rather, how to conduct torture operations with impunity (mine). They write that the CIA was concerned about protecting its turf, its concern being, in light of secrecy and security, the "possible loss of control to U.S. military and/or F.B.I." in which case, on the military, the military would have the disadvantage of being "required to tell the International Committee of the Red Cross, a human rights group, that Mr. Zubaydah was in custody, the agency noted."

To know about Zubaydah is to open the whole can of worms. E.g., Bush, on March 29, 2002, following the capture, "reviewed a plan to open a secret C.I.A. prison in Thailand and send Mr. Zubaydah there." So much for Bush's deniability of events and conditions, AND the desire both of Obama and the Senate Report to afford him this deniability. Zubaydah, "shot and badly wounded, spent several days in a hospital," an F.B.I. agent who later became critical of the Program (see my account) "at his side." The prisoner was cooperative, yet CIA officials meeting at Langley "discuss[ed] ways to break his resistance." From the Senate Report, it was clear that FBI questioning was successful, but that Zubaydah "denied knowing anything about plots against America," which the CIA viewed as holding out and gave Mitchell, the psychologist, the green light to offer "a menu of interrogation options."

Here Apuzzo and Risen are at their best: "While C.I.A. and Justice Department lawyers debated the legality of the tactics, the report reveals, Mr. Zubaydah was left alone in a cell in Thailand for 47 days. The Senate report asserts that isolation, not resistance, was the reason he stopped talking in June. Mr. Soufan [the FBI agent] said he was livid when he read that." Then in August Zubaydah was questioned for three weeks "using the harshest measures available, including waterboarding. But the Senate report says he never revealed information about a plot against the United States. The C.I.A. concluded he had no such information."

Then there is the Salt Pit, a new CIA prison in Afghanistan: Its "windows were blackened and detainees were kept in total darkness. Some detainees were shackled, their arms outstretched, to bars above their heads. Prisoners could go days or weeks without anyone looking at them.... The report added that one man was chained standing to a wall for 17 days." When I speak of war crimes, and war criminals at the head of the US government, is the charge irresponsible? An exaggeration? Unpatriotic? Reluctantly, I would have to say "yes," as defined by central power groups, to the last. That what is described here as being on Bush's watch, does not thereby exonerate Obama, who is guilty, beyond his refusal to bring indictments against key members of the previous administration and its satrapies (from CIA to military services), of crimes against humanity ranging from intervention to drone assassination, not to mention, in the turbid realm of geopolitics, the confrontations with Russia and China risking nuclear annihilation.

My New York Times Comment on the Apuzzo-Risen article, same date, follows:

Move over Butchers of Belsen from the history books, you are replaced by the Butchers of Langley. The Apuzzo/Risen account is incredible for what it reveals, an Agency in our midst whose personnel "brainstormed" on how to be most diabolical, cruel, savage, equal to the Nazi devils, with approval at the very top, and you tell me prosecution for war crimes isn't necessary. America will always stand in disgrace among people who haven't abandoned their moral-religious-ethical standards. A country that tortures, an agency at the heart of

government free to act with impunity in devising, allowing, executing the most fiendish and vicious treatment human beings can impose on one another.

America a moral nation? Don't make me laugh. America a Christian nation? I can hear Christ's screams of anguish from here. And best of all, we honor these men as national heroes—CIA who have kept us SAFE (without such as them and the nation that stands behind them, we wouldn't have to worry about safety), Pres. Bush, who claims deniability (as does the Senate report in letting him off the hook), who on Feb 7, 02, held that laws of war do not apply to Qaeda suspects, open sesame to torture, Sec. Rumsfeld, who denied prisoners basic protections by ruling out military prisons—instead, BLACK HOLES where the human depravity of Americans could find full and free expression.

By rights, 200M Americans should vomit, do penance, throw out the politicians, ABOLISH CIA, and instead, business as usual.

DECEMBER 15, 2014

### **Gluttony of American Finance**

Query: Can you have a counterrevolution without a revolution? In logic, perhaps not; in America, now illustrated by the pending \$1.1tr Appropriations legislation, emphatically yes. The pressure is on, and to focus exclusively on Republican opportunism (lateness, threat of government shutdown, blackmail) is to misread and misjudge the wider forces at work: the financialization of American capitalism, Democratic party's equal complicity in serving and advancing banking interests, the ever-Rightward progression of the political-ideological spectrum on bipartisan lines, and, in this case, confirmation of the acceleration of ruling groups' dominance as if a one-way street. Yes, the crippling of Dodd-Frank by again freeing-up derivatives trading, government obligingly backing-up this species of big-time gambling with depositors' monies through bailout-guarantees should the bets turn south.

But that is not new, the replay of 2008 only a replay given the (again) bipartisan desire to serve as the House—how envious Las Vegas must be—in this gambling enterprise. Not new: Clinton had already set about dismantling Glass-Steagall in the mid-90s by bringing to power at Treasury, Council of Economic Advisers, direct legislation, etc., the Rubin-Sommers crowd of regulatory dismantlers, leaving, under liberal auspices, the banking system easy prey to the megabanks circling the wagons. Republicans today are merely validating and completing the work of Wall Street's enhanced power in world politics and its role in the domestic economy, i.e., the larger policy-context, which affects the fusion of militarism and capitalism in America. Nothing is left to chance. I say this, not as one enamored with conspiracy theory but only following out the trends, as in the decisions promoting intervention, confrontation, hegemonic claims to unilateral global supremacy.

Not coincidentally, the new Appropriations legislation devotes practically one half (\$490B) to defense, no cutting there—in contrast to the skilled paring down of the social safety net. But why should it be any different, when this perhaps-new stage of capitalism is intended to place finance capitalism itself on a permanent war and/or expansionist footing? Go back with me ten decades, to Rudolph Hilferding's *Das Finanzkapital* (1910) to see the direction we are heading (or have already arrived), a dangerous or qualitative jump in capitalist development carrying with it militaristic

prospects and consequences, and the regimentation—“soft” or “hard,” manipulation and a taste of the goodies as so many crumbs from the table, or, now, into a twilight zone, massive surveillance, the conjuring of a universal/ubiquitous Enemy, The Terrorist, necessitating the National Security State—of the American people. The US has been hatching this structure at least since the time of Hilferding, with Red Scares and Palmer Raids, to McCarthyism, to the NSA assault on civil liberties—curiously, in these cases mostly under Democratic administrations.

So, briefly, here is Hilferding for some guidance (and my guidance to him, largely via Paul Sweezy’s *The Theory of Capitalist Development*) in understanding today’s events, a good starting point being how the role of imperialism and militarism, in superseding and partially destroying *laissez faire*, paved the way for finance capitalism, which, more than the industrial phase of capitalism, fosters underconsumption and widening class differentials (where, I think, we’re presently at!). Internal controversies among Marxian economists of World War I vintage, on the importance of underconsumption and falling rate of profit, are too arcane for me to follow, but I see Hilferding recognizing the expansibility of capitalism in its financial form—monopoly and militarism its natural accompaniment. (This conclusion, vouchsafed in practice, doesn’t take a Marxist to figure out; the American leadership and power system have acted on the assumption of militarism and monopoly as the *sine qua non* of American capitalist development for at least a half-century plus.)

Hence, no automatic breakdown theory of capitalism, which I take to be the motivating factors, with the structure of consolidation in place, for imperialism and militarism—the system will not dissolve of its own (Hilferding, the Social Democrat, giving unintended credence to the necessity of revolution). The US not having the foggiest notion about such fine points of Marxian disputation, we see the system nonetheless at work on the course of permanent counterrevolution (a Reactive societal formation, even from Day One—Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, on the taking-over of Lockean philosophy, remarked, America was born mature, it did not have to make itself so), attempting permanent capitalist expansion at whatever cost.

Consolidation, in the rise of the modern corporation as the groundwork for industrial capitalism, had within itself the next phase, finance capitalism, in which all the chicanery comes bursting out as the entrepreneur becomes divorced from production and devotes his being to profits, influence, deals, short-cuts, phony stock issuance—why blame Bernie Madoff as an exemplar of the falsification of a political economy transitioning from industrial to financial concentration, when his type has been around for years? Penetration of markets, of course, but financial jugglery, pyramiding international financial controls and schemes through American-led organizations, not all at once, not in the 1920s, nor Bretton Woods, but now, IMF, World Bank, a match in heaven for US capitalism (even the outsourcing of US manufacturing to remove some clutter), or more specifically, Morgan Chase et. al.

“Promoters profits” is Hilferding’s generic case, to be elaborated, amplified, twisted to bring us to where we presently are. “Market controls” sounds better, but even that may be gradually lost from sight as sheer manipulation of the financial system becomes an end in itself—my reference to gluttony. Profits in the old-fashioned way through production, why bother, especially when the American political system is at the beck and call of the Goldman boys, Jamie, Bank of America, all leading the charge for scrapping the safeguards to derivatives trading, such as they are, in Dodd-Frank. I think we can leave Hilferding here (I have barely gotten started, still less having done him

justice), but we have a beautiful illustration before us, this very moment, of finance capitalism run amuck, Obama, for one, greasing the way. Don't make the mistake of structural determinists (Hilferding didn't), capitalists and their lackeys—how else characterize Obama and all but a few Democrats, Republicans, it goes without saying, the few opposing the legislation on extraneous rather than principled grounds—have actively to continue the progression of business/banking favoritism, not sit back and let it just happen.

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I begin with Ed O'Keefe's Washington Post article, "House passes \$1.1 trillion spending bill," (Dec. 12), the 219-206 vote coming hours before government shutdown. By now, we're familiar with the details, my concern, the clash between Pelosi and some House Democrats against Obama, his cowardice and treachery revealed for all to see. When a procedural motion to begin debate was finally passed, it was Obama, Biden, and White House officials, in "a concerted lobbying effort," who "helped secure enough support" for that to happen, he promising to sign the legislation if passed. A cave-in of the first water, except that Obama was already in Wall Street's pocket. Pelosi rightly charged blackmail (government shutdown) and in words bespeaking her finest hour (there have been few such indeed), she said: "I'm enormously disappointed that the White House feels that the only way they can get a bill is to go along with this [the this being rescinding Dodd-Frank safeguards on trading derivatives]."

Democrats were unhappy. Obama & Co. did the arm twisting to support the bill: "In addition to Obama and Biden, Jeffrey Zients, chairman of Obama's National Economic Council, and Shaun Donovan, the White House budget director, phoned wavering Democrats. So did Democratic members of the Senate Appropriations Committee [Barbara Mikulski, its chair, and Christopher Coons]." Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff, also pushed hard, "an in-person plea for support during a closed-door meeting in the basement of the U.S. Capitol on Thursday night [night of passage]." Throw in the drastic loosening of allowable campaign donations—and the Obama record is dismal, to me, par for the course for him. 139 Democrats voted against the bill, 59 in favor, including minority whip Steny Hoyer. To give House Democrats backbone, Elizabeth Warren made a courageous speech in the Senate the day before, to which James Moran House Democrat (Va.) resorted to old-school red-baiting: "That's what you do when you run for president. You get out front knowing that there are a whole lot of people who are not going to let anyone get to the left of them." So much for Democratic party progressivism.

But Obama and Co., and fellow Senate Democrats, are not the only callers. Steven Mufson and Tom Hamburger's Washington Post Workblog article, "Jamie Dimon himself called to urge support for the derivatives rule in the spending bill," (Dec. 12), in its heading says it all:

Democrats, especially Congress freshmen, are either so weak or so opportunistic, in either case, slobbering over wealth and standing in awe of the major bankers—the revolving door perhaps beckoning—as to go over lock, stock, and the people's barrel to Big Finance. One suspects that a call from Dimon would be sufficient, Obama hardly mattering where one's bread is buttered. The reporters write: The acrimony between Obama and his party "largely pivoted on a single item in a 1,600-page piece of legislation to keep the government funded: Should banks be allowed to make risky investments using taxpayer-backed money?" Bad enough, an attack on a key provision of Dodd-Frank, but, they say, "even more outrageous to Democrats was that the language in the bill

appeared to come directly from the pens of lobbyists at the nation's biggest banks, aides said. The provision was so important to the profits [we tend to neglect how much, for the banks, is riding on this—mine] at those companies that J.P. Morgan's chief executive Jamie Dimon himself telephoned individual lawmakers to urge them to vote for it, according to a person familiar with the effort."

Josh Earnest, Obama spokesman, stated, "'The president is pleased,'" and that he doesn't like "'a specific provision in this omnibus that would be related to watering down one provision of the Wall Street reform law,'" still, "'on balance, [he] does believe that this compromise proposal is worthy of his support.'" Anyone attuned to the special language of Washington knows that "compromise," far from signifying shame is used to proclaim Victory, as though much had been gotten in its place. Fortunately, Mufson-Hamburger see through the phony rationale: "But 'that provision' isn't just any provision. It's one that goes to the heart of the Dodd Frank reform because it would let big banks undertake risky activities with funds guaranteed by the federal government and, hence taxpayers." Pelosi, recognizing what was at stake (now, FDIC protection for the riskiest investments, whereas Dodd-Frank ordered them, credit default swaps and all, into separate entities, outside that protection), superbly noted in her speech: "'[The amendment went] back to the same old Republican formula: privatize the gain, nationalize the risk. You succeed, it's in your pocket. You fail, the taxpayer pays the bill.'" Irrefutable logic, except to the bankers (or perhaps they fully know the score, and therefore go on the offensive).

The American Banking Association (ABA), in the person of James Ballentine, its executive vice president of congressional relations and political affairs, has all the answers. Setting up separate entities "'to engage in derivatives and commodities trading isn't practical.'" Besides, it limits banks' ability to extend credit to their clients. Most telling, and heart-rending, "'[Setting up separate affiliates] makes one stop shopping impossible for businesses ranging from family farms to energy companies that want to hedge against commodity price changes.'" Let's give Simon Johnson of MIT the last word in this account. Why the change? "'It is because there is a lot of money at stake. They want to be able to take big risks where they get the upside and the taxpayer gets the potential downside.'" Johnson is no flaming radical. He is former chief economist of the IMF and professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

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Not surprisingly, banks were active in pressing for this revision of Dodd-Frank for some time. I haven't mentioned Citigroup yet. Here it is important to go back to May 2013, Eric Lipton and Ben Protess's New York Times article, "Banks' Lobbyists Help in Drafting Financial Bills," (May 23), as the preparatory ground for what lies ahead in the Appropriations bill now moving to the Senate, and with Obama's blessing (along with that of Harry Reid, in stark contrast to Pelosi) certain passage. We think of legislation as the creation of legislators—silly us. Lipton-Protess write: "Bank lobbyists are not leaving it to lawmakers to draft legislation that softens financial regulations. Instead, the lobbyists are helping to write it themselves." Citigroup authored "one bill that sailed through" House Financial Services which "would exempt broad swathes of trades from new regulation." Its recommendations "were reflected in more than 70 lines of the House Committee's 85-line bill.... Two crucial paragraphs... were copied nearly word for word." Not bad for an independent Congress, immune to regulatory crash.

This is on Obama's watch, and the reporters can state matter-of-factly, "The lobbying campaign shows how, three years after Congress passed the most comprehensive overhaul of regulation since the Depression, Wall Street is finding Washington a friendlier place. The cordial relations now include a growing number of Democrats in both the House and the Senate, whose support the banks need if they want to rollback parts of [Dodd-Frank]." I confess to giving little credence to campaign contributions in explaining legislative behavior—yet here it is, and I'm reminded of V.L. Parrington's description of the Great Barbeque after the Civil War. Lipton-Protest: "And as its lobbying campaign steps up, the financial industry has doubled its already considerable giving to political causes. The lawmakers who this month supported the bills championed by Wall Street received twice as much in contributions from financial institutions compared with those who opposed them.... In recent weeks, Wall Street groups also held fund-raisers for lawmakers who co-sponsored the bills. At one dinner.., corporate executives and lobbyists paid up to \$2,500 to dine in a private room of a Greek restaurant just blocks from the Capitol with Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, Democrat of New York, a co-sponsor of the bill championed by Citigroup."

Oh, the soul-searching on conflicts of interest. Jim Himes, third-term [at time of writing] Democratic congressman from Connecticut, head of the party's fund-raising in the House, member of the Financial Services Committee, former Goldman banker, and "one of the top recipients of Wall Street donations," said, no doubt anguished, "I won't dispute for one second the problems of a system that demands immense amount of fund-raisers by its legislators. It's appalling, it's disgusting, it's wasteful and it opens the possibility of conflicts of interest and corruption. IT'S UNFORTUNATELY THE WORLD WE LIVE IN [my caps].'" In a nutshell, the Democratic slogan for rationalizing everything from gutting Dodd-Frank to armed drone assassination to massive surveillance to confrontation with Russia and China, the present instance of banker favoritism part of the same fabric justifying intervention, militarism, imperialism—again, on Obama's watch (building on predecessors, but also intensifying policies in critical areas). It is as though Wall Street recognizes that it's easier to work through Democrats, who afford an appearance of liberalism and reform in pushing the whole Reactionary agenda. (This of course tells us something about liberalism and reform—completely perverted since the New Deal, if not earlier.)

Jonathan Weisman's NYT article, "Furor Over Move to Aid Big Banks in Funding Bill," (Dec.12), adds little to the discussion, but he does have a good point made by Simon Johnson on the repeal of the Dodd-Frank derivatives provision: "Mr. Johnson said the evocation of family farms and mom-and-pop banks [referring to the Ballentine quote above] was specious. The four largest banks conduct more than 93 percent of all derivatives trading in the United States. The repeal push is for them, he said." And finally we have fellow Times reporters Ashley Parker and Robert Pear's article, "House Narrowly Passes Bill to Avoid Shutdown; \$1.1 Trillion in Spending," (Dec. 12), which makes clear Obama's support and that of much of the party. Steve Israel, NY Democratic congressman, however, echoed Pelosi's criticism: "This bill is a one-two punch at middle-class voters. It weakens financial regulation on big banks and rewards Congress for doing so by increasing campaign donation limits of big donors. This is exactly why middle-class voters have a contempt of Congress." I am not comfortable with the middle-class designation to describe opposition, working class, working poor, minorities, all seem more pertinent. But in a storm of counterrevolution one takes what one can get—even an Elizabeth Warren candidacy (riding the wave of that designation), even though her foreign policy still needs to be smoked out.

My New York Times Comment on the Parker-Pear article, same date, follows:

For Democrats, a Night of Infamy. The party deserves to go down the tubes: cowardly, attuned to Wall Street, supportive of war and intervention, difficult to distinguish from Republicans.

Pelosi's shining hour, her first courageous stand after years of accommodation to the Right. Hopefully, the Pelosi-Obama split will widen, the few progressives left in the country now alerted to the Obama Treachery, from Barack Wall Street Obama to Barrack Drone Assassination Obama is only a baby step.

Let the US One-Party phenomenon continue. With Republicans in control and a miniscule, feckless opposition, we should see Corporatism-Militarism so far in the ascendance as to be described in a single word: to wit, fascism.

Wealth is in the saddle. Derivatives are back. Hatred toward the world (Obama already has increased tensions with China and Russia) now to be expressed without restraint. We'll see demonstrable social change within a decade, an irreversible trend toward global warming, increased military spending, heightened wealth concentration, all of which have been in progress for decades.

Perhaps the only good thing about the present fiasco is the exposure of Obama as a fake, and the Democratic party as UNWORTHY of its past. FDR is turning in his grave at Hyde Park.

DECEMBER 17, 2014

### **Obama and Brennan**

When someone is ignorant and willing, anything can happen. And usually does. In a nutshell, Obama, the plaything of a foreign policy deeply ingrained in a historical process of unilateral global hegemony resting on the foundation of military power and international financial dominance, has created an open hole—or strictly, enlarged the one left by his predecessors from at least Kennedy forward—to which the forces of intervention and policies of torture have rushed in to fill. His self-acknowledged companion in the pursuit and commission of war crimes, which they define as Patriotism in the name of and to protect The National Security State, is, now proudly bruited about, John Brennan, current DCIA, defending the Agency in the face of the Senate Report on Torture. Obama has his back, the mantle of lese majesty in staring down, showing contempt for, civilized standards of human conduct, thrown onto the shoulders with approval of his chief torturer-in-residence. What a team, Obama & Brennan, song-and-dance of death to countless thousands well beyond the drone assassinations drawing them closer, the American banking community appreciative onlookers.

Do I exaggerate their relationship (no innuendo here, my concern being their ideological closeness AND commitment to enhanced—you name it, from interrogation techniques to Manichean worldview to a disdain for Congress, separation of powers, oversight of any kind, from any quarter. Fellow rogues of a rogue government, one, the constitutional law instructor whose despicement of the Constitution (think massive surveillance, denial of habeas corpus rights to detainees, use of Espionage Act against whistle-blowers) is legion, the other, exhibiting a warrior-



theological conception of just wars armed with self-righteousness as he climbs the career ladder in intelligence, in all respects, together, a convergence on Cold War beatitudes, starting with “Blessed are the strong of the earth.” In answer to the question, Do I exaggerate, let’s look at New York Times reporters Peter Baker and Mark Mazzetti’s article, “Brennan Draws on Bond With Obama in Backing C.I.A.,” (Dec. 15), in which we’re talking, not about preferences in ice cream flavors, but the shielding from scrutiny of an infamous, antidemocratic Agency at the heart of the United States government.

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Baker-Mazzetti’s opener says it all: “Just hours before he publicly responded last week to the Senate Intelligence Committee report accusing the Central Intelligence Agency of torture and deceit, John O. Brennan, the C.I.A.’s director, stopped by the White House to meet with President Obama. Ostensibly, he was there for an intelligence briefing. But the messages delivered later that day by the White House and Mr. Brennan were synchronized, even down to similar wording, and the larger import of the well-timed visit was hardly a classified secret: After six years of partnership, the president was standing by the embattled spy chief even as fellow Democrats called for his resignation.” Nothing could be plainer. As one who remembers well the guilt-by-association days of McCarthyism, I’m not tarring Obama with Brennan’s war crimes and that of the Agency, copiously documented in the Senate Report on Torture, and instead am suggesting an active partnership-in-war-crimes, Obama, if anything, giving CIA its head of steam under his watch, as in its role in drone assassination at facilities in Pakistan, Brennan himself installed as Director after Valiant Service as national security adviser, all despite questions of favoring waterboarding raised in confirmation hearings. From a pool of gung-ho national-security experts on which to draw, the others still making up his First Team of advisers (include generals, admirals, members of think tanks with partly disguised neocon credentials), Obama plucked Brennan to lead the intelligence charge through the interstices of government and military culminating in a permanent war economy and psychosis of vision.

Obama is not Brennan’s puppet, nor the other way. Both are electrified by mutual contact and support. The reporters note friction between the White House and Langley “after the release of the scorching report,” Brennan having “irritated advisers... by battling Democrats on the committee over the report during the past year.” They do not point out Obama did the same, stalling release, suffocating criticism of CIA hard-ball tactics against the committee, of which later; yet they make up for that with, given that this is NYT, an astonishing statement: “But in the 67 years since the C.I.A. was founded, few presidents have had as close a bond with their intelligence chiefs as Mr. Obama has forged with Mr. Brennan. It is a relationship that has shaped the policy and politics of the debate over the nation’s war with terrorist organizations, as well as the agency’s own struggle to balance security and liberty.” What they don’t say is that counterterrorism is part of the larger US position of counterrevolution, issuing in confrontations with Russia and China and regime change wherever American interests are challenged. Nor do they say, the Agency’s struggle to balance security and liberty was lost before it had fairly begun, assassination and regime change hardly indicative of liberty, a no-contest battle.

Brennan’s blistering attack on Congress (Obama let him be “the administration’s public face in defense of the CIA,” rather than Obama personally), rather problematic, as one former official declared, stating, “It is fairly remarkable that the lead responder here is the director of the C.I.A.”

Brennan went on to claim that only a “limited number” of agents were involved in the torture and, planned ace-in-the-hole argument to avoid such discussion, he and others praised the enhanced techniques as having thwarted terrorist attacks on the Homeland, although he dodged the issue of verification by saying that the results of specific interrogations were unknowable in this regard. Obama in the wings, his supporters, like Bill Daley, former chief of staff, defended Brennan’s testimony, his “institutional responsibility to guard his building.” Daley, typical cynicism: “If John were retired and had a few drinks in him, he might have a different tone to him. But he can’t, nor should he, do anything other than what he’s done.” Cynicism, not confined to Daley, but pervading the administration, top to bottom. I like David Axelrod’s remark, “I slept better knowing that John Brennan never does.” To Obama liberals, America was in good hands.

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A little historical perspective never hurts in understanding policy-directions, even in this case, the recent past, starting a year ago, in which Mazzetti reports in his Times article, “Senate Asks C.I.A. to Share Its Report on Interrogations,” (Dec. 17, 2013), that the request for its internal study “lawmakers believed is broadly critical of [its] detention and interrogation program” was being “withheld from congressional oversight committees.” So much for oversight. Period. We learn that “the committee’s request comes in the midst of a yearlong battle with the C.I.A. over the release of the panel’s own exhaustive report about the program, one of the most controversial policies of the post-Sept. 11 era.” Not only is the CIA report not forthcoming, the Agency exercises a veto over the release of the Congressional report, one which totaled more than 6,000 pages and which “was completed last December [i.e., in 2012, two years ago!] but has yet to be declassified.” Those familiar with the Senate study said it “presents a chronicle of C.I.A. officials’ repeatedly misleading the White House, Congress and the public about the brutal methods that, in the end, produced little valuable intelligence.” Was the White House actually misled or is this, as I suspect, an exercise in deniability/damage control?

This early we see Mark Udall’s [Dem., Colo.] disclosure of the CIA internal report, which was consistent with the Committee report but which “conflicts with the official C.I.A. response to the committee’s report.” He makes the obvious point: “If this is true, this raises fundamental questions about why a review the C.I.A. conducted internally years ago—and never provided to the committee—is so different from the C.I.A.’s formal response to the committee study.” (Udall, who was defeated in 2014, had also distinguished himself in criticizing NSA’s bulk data collections—whether opposition to either CIA or NSA having relevance to his losing his seat is of course a moot point.) In all of this stonewalling—for CIA is an executive agency under Obama’s control—I give the president the last word here, hung I should think by his own incriminating words on his alleged denunciation of enhanced techniques (May, 2013): The US “compromised our basic values by using torture to interrogate our enemies, and detaining individuals in a way that ran counter to the rule of law.” CIA uber alles.

A parallel aside, CIA and NSA, both on Obama’s watch, joined at the hip in one important respect, their sphere of unrestrained activity, contempt for Constitutional oversight, and connivance in the latter by the president, adding up to a state-within-the-state signaling the wider potential for totalitarianism in America. Briefly, Times reporters Mazzetti and David Sanger, in their article, “Top Intelligence Official Assails Snowden and Seeks Return of N.S.A. Documents,” (Jan. 29, 2014), shows the same brazen claim of privilege the CIA has staked out and gained, with James

Clapper somewhat a carbon copy of Brennan in conduct toward Congressional oversight, both agencies dancing under Obama's umbrella. Mazzetti-Sanger: "The nation's top intelligence official... delivered a scorching attack on Edward J. Snowden... and called on him and his 'accomplices' to return the trove of classified documents he took from the N.S.A." Like Brennan's feigned righteous indignation, Clapper hoped his august presence and authority would silence critics. Thus, the reporters continue: "Mr. Clapper did not give specific examples to bolster his assessment about the damage Mr. Snowden had done. He also did not say whom he believed Mr. Snowden's accomplices to be." He also expressed his resentment in his annual testimony to Congress to "having to testify in public about classified issues," surely no argument there from Brennan—mine.

Ron Wyden (Dem., Or.), like Udall, a strong critic, here, of NSA, stated that "the dealings between spy agencies and their congressional overseers were crippled by a 'culture of misinformation.'" Wyden, the year before, caught Clapper in a flat lie about "whether intelligence agencies were collecting any bulk information about Americans," Clapper saying "they were not," and later, "he had to apologize for that answer after Mr. Snowden revealed an N.S.A. program to collect and store domestic phone records." No wonder the desire and intent to silence Snowden, he exposed the lies. Obama serenely said nothing, Clapper going his merry way. The hearing was before Senate Intelligence, so Brennan was also present, the account instructive of collusion whichever way one looks: "On two occasions, Democratic senators tried to press Mr. Brennan for details about an internal C.I.A. review that they said contradicted the agency's official response to the Intelligence Committee's report. Both times, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat, who leads the committee, cut off the questioning and said the matter would be discussed behind closed doors." The Brennan-Feinstein conflict over disclosure of the Senate's Terror Report, suggesting her principled opposition (for once) to CIA activities, however, does not cancel out her years of protecting the Agency, makes one suspicious that even worse excrement remains hidden, and testifies to her realization that her credibility was now on the line—perhaps so that she could be able to render the intelligence community effective service later.

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The CIA remained busy, yet restive in defining its mission, with Brennan, in spring of this year, seeking to devolve some functions to the Pentagon, while widening its broadly-defined counterterrorism reach. Yes, turf wars, but also, I gather, the attempt to centralize its power within government, being at the nerve-center of arresting progressive currents of thought and radical movements of change in the world. We see the militarization of intelligence, but intelligence, that way conceived, as the national mission of counterrevolution. Nip social and structural changes in the bud, rather than assist in every Special Ops assignment that comes along. Mazzetti, in an NYT article, "Delays in Effort to Refocus C.I.A. From Drone War," (Apr. 5), perhaps unwittingly sees the strengthening Obama-Brennan bond in the way CIA is given free rein of self-invention, even in adjusting its relations to the Pentagon. No other agency is allowed such protean form, in this case, under the artificial civilian-military distinction, which gives to foreign governments deniability that US military forces are being employed in their countries. In Yemen, Pentagon drones have been banned "by the government there after a number of botched operations in recent years killed Yemeni civilians," while CIA operations continue. Pakistan, "the C.I.A. remains in charge of drone operations, and may continue to be long after American troops have left Afghanistan." Jordan

illustrates the larger trend: “it is the C.I.A. rather than the Pentagon that is running a program to arm and train Syrian rebels—a concession to the Jordanian government, which will not allow an overt military presence in the country.”

The reporter, despite his lead, recognizes CIA affinity to drone warfare—and, as an Obama signature, its secure place there as long as the Agency deems necessary. (The Pentagon is now starting to assume this function.) Out of the mouths of, if not babes, then, former senior Pentagon officials, here Michael Sheehan, now holding a distinguished chair at West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, who, following the drone shift, notes: “Some might want to get the C.I.A. out of the killing business [Brennan’s stated preference for intelligence], but that’s not happening anytime soon.” Sheehan’s reference to “killing business” warms my heart. He also says that despite the shift in emphasis, the CIA’s Counterterrorism Center (CTC), is powerful inside the Agency and in Congress: “I think that most of the C.I.A. is behind the changes, but the CTC community has grown dramatically since 9/11 and is fighting to keep its turf. And, they’ve been somewhat successful in that regard, especially with the drone programs.” They thus have their cake and eat it.

Mazzetti, in addition to highlighting CIA’s growing importance, e.g., strengthening intelligence gathering and analysis so that the US is not presumably caught flat-footed, as in the events of the Arab Spring or the Russian annexation of Crimea (both, Brennan’s examples), provides useful background on how the Obama-Brennan relation had grown: “Before taking charge of the C.I.A. last March [2013], Mr. Brennan had spent four years as Mr. Obama’s top counterterrorism adviser, a job that put him in charge of the targeted killing operations that became a signature of the Obama administration’s approach to terrorism. It also made Mr. Brennan—who before working for Mr. Obama had spent 25 years at the C.I.A.—a powerful influence on a president with no experience in intelligence.” Will CIA, if it eventually gives up “the work of firing missiles and dropping bombs in far-flung regions of the world,” find its role diminished? Brennan: “Despite rampant rumors that the C.I.A. is getting out of the counterterrorism business, nothing could be further from the truth” [speech, Council on Foreign Relations, in March].

Closing in on the present, we see Obama’s silence when it was revealed that the CIA, in a gross violation of the Constitution’s separation of powers, the Agency hacking into Senate Committee computer files, is further confirmation, if any was needed, that he betrayed the public trust and that of his office, silence now consent in wrongdoing: a toxic compound of protection, friendship, and treason. The last-named, treason, does not trip lightly off the tongue. Yet, overwhelming evidence of CIA spying on Congress, the act taken in secret and intended to prevent authorized supervision over the Agency’s activities, makes a shambles of the principles and structure of democratic governance. And for the president not to speak out, much less prosecute the culprits responsible, including DCIA Brennan, but rather, not content with silence, actually praise the Agency’s head and its record, specifically in response to exposure of its use of torture, permits the use of no other word. Treason, Obama; criminality Brennan; Constitution-wreckers, both. Here Feinstein had no other choice but to raise a warning flag, and despite my criticisms in which she shielded the Agency from scrutiny, at this point she did so bravely. The result was her conflict with Obama as well.

Mazzetti and Carl Hulse in their Times article, “Inquiry by C.I.A. Affirms It Spied on Senate Panel,” (Aug. 1), credits the internal investigation of the Agency’s Inspector General, which found that “its officers penetrated a computer network” used by the Committee, “read the emails of the Senate investigators and sent a criminal referral to the Justice Department based on false

information,” and that “the officers created a false online identity to gain access on more than one occasion” to committee staff computers. Feinstein was angry. Udall demanded Brennan’s resignation. Committee Republicans, calling their own Senate Report a partisan smear, withdrew from the proceedings. Feinstein called the CIA spying on the Committee “a defining moment”; how it is resolved “will show whether the Intelligence Committee can be effective in monitoring and investigating our nation’s intelligence activities, or whether our work can be thwarted by those we oversee.” The CIA-Obama, 1, US Senate Intelligence Committee, 0. Even Brennan’s carefully qualified apology and pro forma agreement on an accountability board led Feinstein to declare these “positive first steps.”

The CIA weathered the storm, better, it came onto golden shores, a complete presidential endorsement in which the word “patriotism” figures prominently. Hulse and Mazzetti’s “Obama Expresses Confidence in C.I.A. Director,” same date, quotes Obama as having “full confidence” in Brennan, despite his having admitted the CIA “improperly searched computer files” of the Committee. There was further compliant: the refusal of Obama’s DOJ to investigate the hacking operation; and Feinstein’s own, that the Executive “had heavily censored a soon-to-be-released committee report” which was critical of the interrogation techniques. Wyden called on Justice “to reconsider whether criminal charges should be pursued under laws prohibiting computer hacking.” Fat chance, Holder and DOJ (think fundamental violations of civil liberties) replicating the record of Obama at his worst. In contrast, Obama at his news conference, said: “I have full confidence in John Brennan.” Then, as though reading from a CIA script, he obfuscates the big point, claiming the hacking was okay in principle because the Senate Committee had taken CIA documents that it, CIA, had not authorized disclosure of, when what is dodged is, how can an executive agency keep secret from the oversight committee documents it wishes to hide—Obama’s heightened executive-privilege doctrine and practice smudged over by sleight-of-hand wording: “I think he has acknowledged and directly apologized to Senator Feinstein that C.I.A. personnel did not properly handle an investigation as to how certain documents that were not authorized to be released to the Senate staff got somehow into the hands of the Senate staff.” The investigation was faulty, not the refusal to supply documents to the Senate.

Obama went on to claim the Senate Report itself had been returned to the Committee for release. He didn’t mention that fully 15% of the Report had been redacted, which meant more stalling as objections to the specific redactions had to be raised—the determination left to the Executive. Almost five months later, the nation is still waiting—mine. Blithely, Obama sailed on: “We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured some folks. We did some things that were contrary to our values.... [Yet] it is important for us not to feel too sanctimonious in retrospect about the tough job that those folks had. And a lot of those folks were working hard under enormous pressure and are real patriots.” As for DOJ investigation of CIA hacking into Committee staff computers (Wyden still persisted), Peter Carr gave the Department’s response: “We already carefully reviewed the matters referred to us and did not find sufficient evidence to warrant a criminal investigation.” When Justice engages in a cover-up, beware of the health and vitality of the rule of law.

Coming to the present, we find Brennan on offense, as seen in Mazzetti and Matt Apuzzo’s Times article, “C.I.A. Director Defends Use of Interrogation Tactics, Avoiding Issue of Torture,” (Dec. 11), in which they say he “strongly defended [at a Langley news conference] C.I.A. officers

who carried out brutal interrogation tactics against Qaeda suspects, describing agency interrogators as ‘patriots’ and admonishing only those who went ‘outside the bounds’ of Justice Department rules.” The vast majority, patriots, the few, possible, though unlikely, miscreants, their names kept unknown, no convictions thus far recorded; as for Justice Department rules, we have the Office of Legal Counsel to thank, John Yoo in particular, for tailoring the law to excuse the crime—Holder’s bunch hardly if at all modifying earlier rules and practices. An inspiring sight and site for the news conference, believed the first at Langley: the marble lobby of CIA headquarters, with to his right the Memorial Wall, 111 stars representing agents killed in action, and to his left, a passage from the Gospel of St. John etched in stone, of course, why not go all the way, “And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Sublime, ideal for the promulgation of the doctrine of just wars, and on the practical side plans for regime change and drone assassination.

He spoke in modesty about torture (never using the word): “Although he said the C.I.A. was out of the interrogation business, he offered no assurances that anything prevented the government from authorizing the same techniques in the face of another crisis. ‘I defer to the policy makers in future times,’ he said.” The torture of Abu Zubaydah, who I discuss in previous CP articles, was within DOJ boundaries. Thailand, 2002: “The interrogation sessions,” Mazzetti and Appuzo write, “became so extreme that some C.I.A. officers began choking up with tears” and requested transfer from the prison. During one water-boarding session, Zubaydah became, according to one CIA cable in the Senate Report, “completely unresponsive with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth.” We learn from further CIA cables, he would, after weeks of torture, “dutifully get into position to be water-boarded with just the cock of an eyebrow and two finger snaps from an interrogator.”

No torture? This is what the partnership of Obama and Brennan wrought. Not to be outdone in his journey with America into the moral abyss, Obama, yesterday (at time of writing), went on the road to exhort the troops and bolster his own reputation. Peter Baker’s article, “Obama Defends Progress Against Extremists,” (Dec. 16), has the president in Lakehurst, NJ, in a giant hangar, “with a C-130 Hercules parked to his left,” proclaiming the momentum of ISIL has been undercut. 3,000 troops in camouflage before him, he continued: “And these terrorists are learning the same thing that the leaders of Al Qaeda have learned the hard way.... You threaten America, you will have no safe haven. We will find you.” Taking out ISIL installations through airstrikes, “damaging its command and control structure and fracturing its supply lines,” America has led the way. “That’s what we do.” In sum, a true patriot.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker-Mazzetti article, same date, follows:

Are we surprised? Thanks for an excellent article. The last straw: anyone giving high marks to Obama as POTUS should have the veil torn from one’s eyes. The Brennan relationship confirms a Rightist-militarist-hegemonic leader whose race and Democratic-party credential fend off criticism; in reality, a disgrace to the Black community and to Democrats. The former, via racial solidarity, are blind to his policies, while the latter, the party itself, has sunk deeply into the morass of permanent-war psychosis and Wall Street aggrandizement.

A worse president, difficult to imagine. The Brennan connection proves it. FDR had Hopkins and Morgenthau; Obama has Brennan, the two shielding the CIA as per se a criminal enterprise sucking out the lifeblood of democracy. From drone assassination to NSA mass surveillance to Pacific-first strategy positioning the US into confrontation with

China (after having brought the US and EU into a collision course with Russia), speaks to the formation of a Police State whose inner spring is corporate power and welfare.

The paradigm matches Fascism. With Obama-Brennan, it's only a matter of time, Hillary, Iron Lady of Attack and Intervention, completing the process. Yes Republicans have Cruz, Graham, Ryan, unsophisticated players in the geopolitical drama. The Democrats, win or lose come 2016, have carried America to the brink, if not already over.

Brennan, hit list and much more, is a war criminal, not different from his boss.

DECEMBER 19, 2014

### **US-Cuba Rapprochement**

I write in anger. America smells blood, or rather New Investment, corporate swallowing of the total economy, a market for dumping surplus production, all with the added advantage—at the heart of its hatred for Cuba—of destroying an Alternative mode of society, culture, values, production, which, if allowed to exist, represents a moral-political-economic refutation of US global aggression, widening class differences of wealth and power, an ethos of self-indulgence and selfish individualism, all wrapped in stifling righteousness. The python is America, deadly in its embrace—its proto-fascistic groundswell in Miami, its Congress largely the whores of the business-financial system, its president, seemingly in quest of peace when simultaneously straining toward the return to unilateral global hegemony by whatever means, from drone assassination to regime change to massive military spending to brinkmanship in a political-ideological confrontation with Russia and China.

To Cubans I ask, do you want this mammoth python slithering through your house? For more than a half-century we have seen Captive-Nations propaganda applied to Cuba, people starving, people in chains—what utter falsehood! Deprivation, yes, thanks to US strangulation—yet not enough to cripple the medical system, and more basic, not enough to destroy the spirit of a free people. My own visit a decade ago—no minders present—showed remarkable strides in education and quality-of-life issues I value: simple honesty, pleasure in family and nature, spirited argumentation, quiet chess-playing in the park. Cuba was everything America was not, hence the hatred on the US's part. For Cuba to be allowed to live was like a subconscious explosive under the skin for Americans with our crazed materialism, our braggadocio, our deep-lying fear of difference. Cuban multiracialism alone undercuts America's vested interest in translating race into a power-relationship. The 1950s cars, still running fine thank you, a reminder of the silly covetousness in feeling naked (alas conspicuous consumption) without the latest model changes. The Cuba I saw stood for harmony, not frenetic movement in besting one another. So, what does the rapprochement come down to? I fear the shattering of a nation's identity.

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But hopefully Cuba is too internally strong to become another American colony. Extensive Spanish capital in developing Veradero Beach has not resulted in spoliation, but Spain is not the US in wanting the merciless grab of natural resources. Venezuela's barter-framework with Cuba, Cuba providing medical education in training doctors for that country, the other supplying needed oil and

other products in exchange, is also non-exploitative. The US is different. You can't kill in Iraq and Afghanistan, and at the same time bestow kisses on Cuba. Soon if not already, the test of Cuba's deserving America's friendship will be acceptance of IMF and World Bank intrusions in its economy and society, else—the Rubio, Cruz, Bush, Menendez brigade (for we must be bipartisan)—let the dirty commies rot, and even then, let them rot. Not that much has changed; the embargo remains. Tourists are not included in removing travel restrictions. The propaganda offensive has not abated. Oh those vile Castro brothers!

Essentially, like Vietnam, the US has lost the battle. When Obama speaks of “an outdated approach that for decades has FAILED TO ADVANCE OUR INTERESTS” (my caps.), he is not criticizing the approach, e.g., the Bay of Pigs invasion of another country, continuous CIA schemes toward assassination and regime change, using Cuba as the poster-child for keeping up a rigid anticommunism particularly pernicious in US dealings in Latin America, but also handy with respect to Russia, China, and North Korea, but only that it did not work. As with every major policy decision, the US is not in the business of good Samaritan but, for once the unalloyed truth, he avows the advancement of American interests. Even the Chamber of Commerce is on board, not noted for selfless humanitarianism. The snakes will descend on the Island as though carried by a Plague. Meanwhile, Miami Cubans will do more than grouse—a volatile core of aggressors right up there with Ukraine's Right Sector—a lumpen force ready in waiting to take over.

The New York Times editorial, “Mr. Obama's Historic Move on Cuba,” (Dec. 18), perfectly illustrates the inner core of animus and destruction at the heart of so-called enlightenment. With friends like the US and The Times, the Cuban people hardly need enemies. The Times praises Obama's “bold move [Dec. 17] that ends one of the most misguided chapters in American foreign policy.” Why misguided, save for losing out? The editorial lists a number of steps toward normalization (e.g., removing Cuba from “the State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism”), which it claims “is a change in direction that has been strongly supported by this page.” Emphatically, not—see my NYT Comment below. In its magnanimity, the administration “is ushering in a transformational era for millions of Cubans who have suffered as a result of more than 50 years of hostility between the two nations.” I pause here to explain, it is not The Times that is important, but its typicality of authoritative subtle reasoning to damn the Cuban government and exonerate the American, for a half-century of unnecessary and cruel deprivation of the people—the millions who have suffered, no indication as to blame and accountability for this. No embargo, no blockade, no invasion, no attempt at international ostracism, nothing but the 50 years of hostility presumably to be laid at Fidel Castro's feet. Obama “has courageously gone as far as he can,” in light of Helms-Burton's 1996 sanctions regime—more punishing than that applied to Iran, at least until his latest tightening (mine).

Still, NYT persists in its indictment, even in the context of praising Raul Castro for beginning in 2008 “a process of economic reforms,” when it declares that “Cuba remains a repressive police state with a failed economy.” I beg to disagree on both counts, however severe the hardships faced by the people due to economic sanctions, because the first charge, “a repressive police state,” mouthed ad nauseam in American political and media circles, in addition to finding more suitable application among America's “friends and allies,” is contradicted by the responsiveness of social and political institutions to the people's needs. I saw police in khaki, unarmed, integrated as part of the community. I saw clinics in operation. I saw no begging, social tension, fear. The editorial doesn't



miss a dig. Raul also “lifted travel restrictions the government cruelly imposed on its citizens.” (As the shamus at the synagogue told me, visas were freely given to anyone wishing to go to Israel.)

Let’s get down to brass tacks. What do Obama, The Times, influential segments of the American business community like about rapprochement? Contrast what Raul Castro is saying, ““We must learn the art of coexisting with our differences in a civilized manner,”” with the editorial’s positive gushing in moving in for the kill: “The changes the Obama administration announced have the potential to empower Cuba’s growing entrepreneurial class by permitting commercial and financial transactions with the United States. The White House also intends to make it easier for American technology companies to upgrade the island’s primitive Internet systems, a step that could go a long way toward strengthening civil society.” Liberation, here we come. And for greater effectiveness in making over Cuba, the US will now have greater success “because other governments in the Western Hemisphere will no longer be able to treat Cuba as a victim of the United States’ pointlessly harsh policy.” At least the last point, unless drolly put, was allowed to slip out.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

The Times has a short editorial memory. Its correspondent at the time of the Revolution, Ruby Phillips, wrote from her luxury hotel room the most scurrilous attacks on Fidel Castro and praised the real dictator Batista. This bias persisted over decades. Now in this editorial more gratuitous slurs about dictatorship, repression etc. Pour venom on a people the US used every trick to destroy (invasion, embargo, blockade, sanctions).

No, Cubans do not live in oppression. Their medical system and medical education are superb. My visit to a synagogue was most instructive, to a country school, likewise. You demonize Fidel just as you demonize Putin, as though the Left (which may not even apply to Russia) is the work of the Devil.

And now? Obama has done what he always does: open the country to financial-commercial imperialism, send in the NGOs to destroy the political fabric of society, NYT chanting “liberalization” in the background. Hosannas to capitalism. Find a new Batista and shove him down the throats of the Cuban people.

I wish Cuba would reject US offers of “friendship” for what they are, the push, as with Latin American policy in general, to economic penetration and subjugation. Alternatives to the American Way are deemed INTOLERABLE. We destroyed Chile’s democracy, the same CIA so skilled in torture. We installed the Generals in Brazil. We despised Hugo and sought to undermine his leadership.

NYT never learns. Oppression of others is too sweet.

DECEMBER 23, 2014

### **Normalization of Imperialism (Cuba)**

The Cold War is over. Showing diplomatic vision, boldness, and courage, Obama has in one stroke, the normalization of relations with Cuba, ended nearly 70 years of dangerous international conflict, 55 years of which symbolically and actually focused on Cuba as an energizer for keeping

alive, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, a dangerous global division mostly conducted by proxy armies. We on the Left are grateful, despite some harsh words in the past, to our president for breaking apart the ideological chains enslaving us all. With the newly-established Freedom of the Cuban people, the world can now rejoice.

What utter rubbish! And much of the American Left have swallowed the casuistry, innocents led to the slaughter—not their/our own, but countless millions exposed to the preponderant power of US military-grounded imperialism. Principle: You cannot kill with one hand, and make nice with the other, because making nice leads to further killing. Python (i.e., American capitalism), gorge thyself—serves us right for abandoning the global popular struggle (much of it, especially in the Western Hemisphere, inspired by the Cuban Revolution) and succumbing to the wiles of a president who, because he is black, radicals do not dare to criticize. Go tell it to the Mountain of political correctness; better, tell it to Paul Robeson, Dr. King, A. Philip Randolph, James Chaney, Bob Moses, James Farmer, James Foreman, who would see at once and penetrate the disguises and subterfuges of a Black President dedicated to war, intervention, regime change, assassination, torture—anything but, social justice and improvement of the lives of all working people, black and white alike. Our Obama is no stranger to Wall Street, and that as a first approximation explains the “normalization of relations,” which I choose to call the “normalization of imperialism.”

Python (the master criminal-state) has, perhaps defying the laws of biology, borne a progeny of sharks now circling the waters of Cuba. Eager for the spoliation of a country unwilling to play by America’s rules (ah, halcyon days of Batista, the lights of the Hotel Nacional burning all night for gambling, street beggars, urchins, hovels, the iron boot for stability, prostitution to satisfy the thirst of American tourists) and, therefore, giving hope to other countries seeking to escape the US orbit of imposed degradation, had to be blockaded, strangled, crushed in spirit, if Americans were to have an already reinforced self-righteousness of capitalism confirmed and placed beyond doubt. Cuba was the unconscious nightmare, the Alternative, to be destroyed lest our people learn from its example and demand a democratization of the social structure and political economy. Fidel came before Putin; both must go.

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The Obama policy decision can be viewed on three levels (probably more, but that will do for now): a) most immediate, the financial-commercial-ideological penetration of Cuba, US firms standing by as so many serial rapists ready to pounce. I mean the term quite literally, which stripped of sexual content I tend to think of “rapacious,” as in (Webster’s Ninth Collegiate) excessively grasping or covetous—to be applied to invaders, living on prey, ravenous, and thus, a neutral description of the American business community ready for action. (Marxists using escalated rhetoric might better turn to Webster’s for the sharply denoted meanings which may carry still greater punch—a silly aside.) Yet much as I eschew sexual analogies, one perhaps valid point comes out of the Obama pronouncement of a policy change: this new engagement entails foreplay, softening up the victim, for ultimately wrenching (commercial, financial, etc.) penetration, the victim overpowered in the process. I call this the Cosby Phenomenon, slipping Cuba the cantharis, Spanish fly, to have America’s way with it, unrestrained and with impunity.

Skipping sexual analogies, however, or not completely, we see American banks and corporations lined up as so many serial rapists—no better than that—plunging into the Cuban market. Thumbnail

sketch: Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland are already exporting corn and soybeans; Tyson Foods and Pilgrim's Pride, frozen chickens; Coca-Cola and PepsiCo have made clear, they want in, also Marriott International and, because Cuba has one of the largest deposits of nickel in the world, John Deere and Caterpillar, with mining and farming equipment, are knocking on the door. Telecommunications is not a negligible investment opportunity, especially the Internet infrastructure and services, as well. (See NYT, "What U.S. Companies Can Expect in Cuba," Dec. 20.)

Going a little further, Alicia Parlapiano's NYT chart, "How America's Relationship With Cuba Will Change," (Dec. 17), we find that The Times, true to its (colonial/imperialist) colors, begins on this note of the reporter, the heading "Diplomatic Relations": "There have been no diplomatic relations with Cuba since the early 1960s, after Fidel Castro and his Communist government came to power." Communist, usurpation (came to power), there was little chance for allowing Cuba to find its way—the Bay of Pigs a notable instance. On "Travel Restrictions" we find a number of categories, heretofore to be decided on a case-by-case basis, which still remains in effect, but, now, general licenses to travel, no longer case-by-case, includes, "Support for the Cuban people, including human rights work," "Humanitarian work," "Private foundations and institutes," and "information dissemination," all in all a nifty package hopefully fooling no-one, to turn loose NGOs, CIA, and other species of liberal humanitarianism bringing the Word to a benighted people.

Julie Creswell's NYT article, "U.S. Companies Clamor to Do Business in New Cuban Market," (Dec. 18), lists some of the sharks, the point being that within hours of restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba, US companies "were already developing strategies to introduce their products and services to a market they have not been in for the better part of 50 years—if ever." The thirst for profits drives the engine of diplomacy—mine. Creswell, however, is wise enough to know this will not be a cakewalk, Cuba not lying prostrate at America's feet. "But while there may be robust opportunities for some companies," she writes, "especially those selling products or goods that could be viewed [here succinctly she hits the nail on the head] as enhancing Cuba's own domestic production or helping to develop its underused resources, other companies could get the cold shoulder." Take, for example, McDonald's. She quotes Kirby Jones, an adviser since 1974 on doing business there: "For a company like McDonald's, the Cuban government is going to ask, 'How does McDonald's coming in and selling hamburgers help the economy of Cuba? It's just not going to be like other regions where you see a McDonald's on every corner.'" Viva Raul.

Actually, Obama's intent is quite different, saturate the Cuban market with American chains of whatever kind, including hotels. I raise the point to suggest this is not wholesale capitulation on Cuba's part. The gnashing of teeth in Washington will, no doubt, soon begin. Damien Cave reported on Raul's televised speech at the end of Cuba's legislative session (Dec. 20); his NYT article, "Castro Thanks U.S. but Affirms Cuba's Communist Rule," same date, makes clear he is not easily beguiled by Obama and, whether Cuba in fact is communist—or ever really has been, one delights in twitching Uncle Sam's nose. Cave: "[Raul] declared victory for the Cuban Revolution on Saturday in a wide-ranging speech, thanking President Obama for 'a new chapter,' while also reaffirming that restored relations with the United States did not mean the end of Communist rule in Cuba." Thanking Obama is a nice touch, driving him up the curtains (like Chaplin in "The Great Dictator"). Raul "alternates between conciliatory and combative statements" against the US; he "would accelerate [Cuba's] economic reform [presumably greater capitalistic factors], prioritizing

an end to the country's dual-currency system." Yet the clincher giving one hope the US has not vanquished the Cuban revolution (Cave's account of the speech continues): "But he also said that changes needed to be gradual to create a system of 'prosperous and sustainable communism.'" For good measure, Raul stressed that with open relations now starting, "the only way to advance is with mutual respect." Here my bear hug: "Every country has the inalienable right to choose its own political systems. No one should believe that improving relations with the United States means Cuba renouncing its ideas." And Cave, in explanation, writes: "He [Raul] insisted as he and Fidel Castro have insisted for years that the United States not meddle in the sovereign affairs of the Cuban state."

Surprisingly, a good deal of trade has gone on, the US, we learn being "already the fourth-largest exporter to Cuba, behind China, Spain and Brazil (still only \$359M, latest figures), but of course with the inevitable strings attached: "Producers needed to be paid in cash in advance and payments needed to be funneled through a third-party bank in another country, typically one in Europe." Not the best thing for business expansion, US corporations, with profits involved, proving far less ideological than Obama and Congress. Devry Vorwerk, Cargill's vice-president for corporate affairs, is quoted by Cave: "This is a wonderful first step, but we would like to see the embargo ended." Tell that to Menendez and Rubio.

Thus, Cuba is attempting a selective application of normalization, firms admitted conducive to its own economic growth, the others, wholly consumer-oriented (he mentions Frito-Lay corn chips, Subway, and Dunkin' Donuts), not discouraged, but consigned to the tourist trade. The Spanish chain Melia Hotels International, very well placed, illustrates the Cuban strategy: it receives "only management contracts... the government in Havana prefer[ing] to own the buildings and land itself." American hoteliers may not be so easily persuaded, the CEO of Marriott International saying, "We will take our cues from the U.S. government but look forward to opening hotels in Cuba, as companies from other countries have done already"—except that those companies have agreed to abide by the Cuban ground rules and did not fall back on their governments, as Arne Sorenson proposes here, to force concessions. It will be interesting to see how American business and banking fare under the New Dispensation—if poorly, one can expect the reinstatement of the embargo, boycott, wider encirclement, and the cancelling of recognition. Cuba is no longer a Batista whore house.

For one who talks of normalized relations, Obama in his press conference (Dec. 19) was quite aggressive, as though not Cuba but Russia seemed on his mind. Times reporter Julie Davis, in an article, "Obama Defends Actions on Cuba and Promises Some Compromises With Congress," observes that he "rejected criticism that he should not have reopened American relations with Cuba because of the nation's human rights record [a tricky standard if applied to the US—mine], saying the historic thaw would give the United States more sway over the Cuban government." Trade, per se good in itself, with Obama also becomes the vehicle for regime change, the two inseparable in US policy where applicable, as here, and in more developed countries still a goal (marking subservience to US needs) when assisted through the IMF and World Bank. The selfless statesman reaches out: "The whole point of normalizing relations is that it gives us a greater opportunity to have influence with that government." This is said as a general proposition, carrying beyond Cuba. But on Cuba: "Change is going to come to Cuba. It has to." Yes, but can it be moderated? Does it have to be destructive?

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I noted above that Obama's policy decision can be understood on three levels. We have seen the first, the familiar face of imperialism. The second and third are more difficult to explain (and may be only the figment of my imagination), but I'd like to try. Hence (b), the US move on Cuba can also be understood without reference to Cuba. In my previous article I alluded to the favorable response to Obama's policy among Left leaders in Latin America, who did not couch their praise of him in renewing these diplomatic relations with the same assertion of sovereignty and socialism that Raul did—at least not on record, so that one suspects decades (actually, since the 1890s) of US intervention, occupation, investment in and exploitation of natural resources and agricultural products, regime change, corruption of governments, this and so much more may simply have been enough for them to drop their guard and wish for a better future. The point being, Obama and the US government count on that yearning, that end of ceaseless struggle in face of Behemoth to the North, to continue prosecuting the policy of imperialism, using what appeared a change-of-heart on Cuba as a way of enveloping the whole of Latin America as—in the good old times—an American dependency. Cuba becomes the poster child of American altruism, innocence, humanitarianism.

This is a big propaganda order, but perhaps it is working, that is, until America shows its hand. There are no Bolivarian figures to unite the peoples of Latin America. The cynicism of the American policy toward Cuba has then the added dimension beyond zeroing in on Cuba itself, with the kind of venom seen in Kennedy's Invasion, for the US, as always since then, is after bigger game, global counterrevolution, with Latin America particularly in the cross-hairs because of its history of revolutionary struggle—intolerable so close to American shores. Poor Cuba (as America sees it), to be conquered less for its own sake, good as that is, but not even dignified in its own right as the primary interest of Cuban policy, than a sweeping geopolitical goal which nails down the Hemisphere as prerequisite to regaining world hegemony in the face of a decentralizing international system led by the separate power centers of Russia and China, the latter especially troublesome in Latin America itself as well as in Africa and world markets.

Finally, the third level—admittedly conjecture on my part because I don't think Obama and his national security advisers are quite up to the mark in figuring it out (chalk it up to a stratum of the unconscious in which broader outlines of policy may be formed). Hence (c), if Cuba did not exist, we would have to invent it. Years ago (1967) I advanced the argument with respect to Vietnam (which Time magazine picked up for purposes of ridicule), so indispensable the war in furthering the whole posture of the US in the world. The Cold War could not be allowed to burn out. Too much was on the American plate—the lesser objects of interest, a fear that informal regimentation in support of anticommunism appeared to be breaking down and racial turmoil too had to be brought within the confines of social discipline, both of which the Vietnam War, by flexing the muscle of a strong government and ringing the charges on the theme of patriotism, could be applied to troubled waters. Wartime, especially in curbing free speech and questioning essentials of the social order, was the handmaiden of conformity.

But Vietnam had even more to do with the global system, with the containment of Russia and China already designated the leading priority, followed closely by keeping the brakes on the Third World, so that autonomous patterns of modernization, negating America's imperialist thrust, could be stifled at birth. Vietnam must not be allowed to succeed in this prime anti-colonialist moment, the US picking up where France, in defeat, left off. Like Cuba, Vietnam decades before (yet

contemporaneous with Cuba) raised the specter of global liberation from capitalist hegemony. If the war had not occurred, it would still have been imperative to make the slaughter of an independent country the test case and supreme validation of American might. Iraq more recently has become a rent-a-battleground situation to prove a point. Cuba, an ideological dimension added, simply raised the stakes higher.

DECEMBER 29, 2014

### **Turned Backs, The Mayor and the Police**

The funeral of Officer Ramos on Saturday, Dec. 27, turned into a Fascist spectacle as many in the ranks of the police turned their backs on NYC Mayor de Blasio—a Fascist spectacle because, already heavily militarized, already implicated in wanton killings of blacks nationwide, the police, many coming from far and wide, used the funeral to demonstrate their demand for acting with impunity and their contempt for authority to reign them in. The funeral symbolized the police as enemies of the rule of law, unable and unwilling to bear scrutiny for lawless acts of an ongoing nature but brought to national attention through a sudden condensation of events over the last several weeks. We stand in fear of our own public servants, just as we do toward the CIA on the international plane, a militarization of American life which internalizes, collectively, the repression America as a nation presents to and imposes on the world and internally demands of itself lest its global/domestic Power be questioned.

Turning backs is a gesture of contempt, the surface of a culture, here, a police culture, impossible to achieve and realize had it not rested on wider authoritarian foundations. That gesture, in Queens, was meant to say, de Blasio, and beyond you, all liberal do-gooders, Get Out of Our Way, it is we the vanguard of a New America, proudly defiant of civil authority seeking to safeguard basic human rights, just as our brothers in the CIA are waging the same battle—we're mutually reinforcing one another—to bring into our respective spheres of activity and society the obedience to a vision of Order sanitized to be absolute in its scope, hierarchical in the deference expected of those not entitled to respect of their betters judged so by their loyalty to principles of true Americanism, whether knowing one's place in the Great Pecking Scale of capitalist democracy at home, market fundamentalism abroad, or simply America the impregnable in all matters, bar none.

De Blasio showed weakness where confrontation was demanded, humility, feeding the sadistic juices of those who will continue to trample on human rights, a sincerity and eloquence of mourning, viewed by his detractors as a pushover in their arrogant jealously-guarded claims to the real center of authority in protecting America from its baser self. This fascistic mindset does not register unless it is replicated and reinforced on many levels, again, an interconnectivity of CIA and local police even though not formalized because the integrative bonds of an authoritarian culture, itself fed continuously through the operations and requirements of advanced capitalism, are now too strong seemingly to break. Yet, instead of the police turning their back on de Blasio, it is the American government which has turned its back on the American people, the CIA emblematic—and performing a vanguard role—of the National Security State sinking its roots down into the cities, towns, villages of the nation, the smaller the unit as if to say to the citizenry, there's no place left to hide.

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The failure to prosecute the CIA for torture indicts the Obama administration in its complicity, Obama personally implicated in every water-boarding, sensory deprivation, electric shock treatment, starvation tactic, rectal feeding, Russian roulette scenario, because their very occurrence requires his authorization literal or tacit. But by the American rule of percolation of tyranny downward, this failure to prosecute gives the green light to local police to practice mayhem and murder, knowing the political-ideological climate encloses and justifies their actions. One cannot fault de Blasio, he did what was right and moral in expressing his feelings. Yet, like Weimar, a stand must be taken before it's too late—severe disciplinary action, squeezing the fascist pus out of those disrespectful of the honor and responsibilities of their badge: force the issue; abide by the restraints of lawful authority, or GET OUT. (Liberals may squirm at that recommendation—mild though it is, but it was Weimar liberals who let the Nazis run all over them and crush a democratic-inclined society.)

When I criticize Obama for his silence on CIA war crimes, and those similarly authorized by the Bush administration, I get from liberals the same response: Go after Bush-Cheney. Period. And we thought Reagan was the Teflon-president. Obama cannot be touched, nor, it appears, the Democratic party, when in fact war criminality has reached its zenith in present-day America by him and on his watch. It is precisely liberalism which fuels international aggression, favors Wall Street, promotes IMF/World Bank solutions for all countries resistant to US financial-commercial penetration and takeover, a liberalism which wraps traditional imperialism and domestic conformity in a purported humanitarianism which equates capitalism with freedom and democracy. Cuba is next on the assault list. Republicans are the easily dispensed with shock troops when it comes to sophisticated capitalist planning; they can shake the trees for internal critics, give vent to their permanent ideological rant about the “Castro Brothers,” etc., but in corporate board rooms the mellifluous sound of money, investment, markets, goes on, essentially undisturbed and finding the shrill patriotism generated a useful cover.

But why blur the emphasis on the police? Actually, I do the reverse, because the wider picture brings our topic into better focus. Police brutality is the distillate of American international practice combined with a long history of anticommunism, the former, counterrevolutionary in purpose in the fullest sense, the latter, its domestic analogue, anti-labor, anti-radical, racist, each having unsavory derivatives which spin off of an ethnocentric core. Capitalism in America, that core, rules the waves: possessiveness, the property right, alienation, commodity fetishism, war, intervention, aspirations to global hegemony—all integral, systemic, historically/structurally cultivated to the process of advanced capitalist development. This process does not occur in a societal vacuum. Not when the vast proportion of the population are losers who may or may not recognize this fact, a fact of widening class differences and opportunities, a fact of extreme deprivation for bottom social groups, the results disguised—again, the mailed fist of liberalism, itself disguised as humanitarianism—so as to engender compliance with the groundrules that are prescribed from above. Police brutality? Why not, when the privileged status, if not the survival, of ruling groups is at stake?

The American elite, as an objective stratum, even though they may not work in concert, or not even know each other well, are good at multitasking, i.e., in the service of the conservation of their power. Their needs are met by a generalized stance of authoritative repression; hence, the local police and the CIA (perhaps the FBI as midwife) in fashioning a common bond of resistance to

social change inimical to the interests of their sponsors. Government is the bulwark of hierarchy (often measured in control over wealth and property ownership), national and international. Here though a corrective: this is not meant as a screed directed against all police—my overreaction to officers who turned their backs on de Blasio because he seeks to end brutality and the slaughter of innocents—because we have before us examples of the very opposite, as in the splendid work of Chief Magnus in Richmond, CA, written up by Steve Early in a recent CounterPunch article. The alternative of compassionate, intelligent, humane policing, we are reminded, is still possible and highly effective in providing community safety, dependent, I say, as one who is not a determinist, on the will and moral bearing of those who work to that end. Not so, the CIA, which has proven itself unredeemable, and by all democratic rights, should be abolished.

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Here my interest shifts to the CIA as the umbrella sheltering repression under which such incidents as that at the Ramos funeral take place. Mark Mazzetti's NYT article, "After Scrutiny, C.I.A. Mandate Is Untouched," (Dec. 27), is a crackerjack description of the complicity in repression saturating America's political culture. Mazzetti begins with DCIA Angleton's complaint in 1976 about the Church Committee's investigation of the CIA, as though the Agency were "a medieval city occupied by an invading army," the army being of course Congress—and (mine), the import here being the rejection of all oversight on its activities, which continues down to the present. Already in the 1970s and before, the CIA was engaged in domestic spying and other abuses, and Mazzetti views it "in the midst of convulsions that would fundamentally remake its mission." The Church Committee, coming at the close of US intervention in Vietnam, disclosed "C.I.A. assassination schemes and spying on Vietnam War protesters" which "fueled a post-Watergate fury among many Americans who had grown cynical about secret plots hatched in Washington."

The mood had now changed. Mazzetti writes: "Nearly four decades later, another Senate committee's allegations that the C.I.A. had engaged in torture, lying and cover-up have stirred echoes of the Church era—raising the question of whether the agency is in for another period of change." His heading, "Mandate Is Untouched," alerts us to its unlikelihood, although he may have overestimated what had earlier been achieved. Under the best of motives from outside, the C.I.A. remains largely impervious to change. And Diane Feinstein is no Frank Church, having protected the CIA all these years. Here the reporter strongly implies the Agency's steadfast and obvious resistance to oversight (much as in my example of the police and not only de Blasio but whomever seeks to make the police accountable for their actions, especially not promising when, from the top, POTUS and DOD, the drive is to militarize local police forces): "But the scathing report the Senate Intelligence Committee delivered this month is unlikely to significantly change the role the C.I.A. now plays in running America's secret wars. A number of factors—from steadfast backing by Congress and the White House to strong public support for clandestine operations—ensure that an agency that has been ascendant since President Obama came into office is not likely to see its mission diminished, either during his waning years in the White House or for some time after that." I sense the tentacles of fascism wrapping around democratic governance.

As for earlier, he continues (driving home the contrast in historical periods): "The grim details, shocking at the time, led to a gutting of the agency's ranks and a ban on assassinations, imposed by President Gerald R. Ford. They also led to the creation of the congressional intelligence committees



and a requirement that the C.I.A. regularly report its covert activities to the oversight panels.” Obama is no Ford; one who could not walk and chew gum at the same time proved the greater guardian of freedom than the fluent, sophisticated Harvard Law-trained master of doublethink and doubletalk who skillfully fronted for the military and intelligence communities, the CIA particularly close to his bosom. Evidence of torture is obvious and abundant in the Senate Intelligence report, but as Mazetti almost predictably notes: “But the Obama administration has made clear that it has no plans to make anyone legally accountable for the practices described by the C.I.A. as enhanced interrogation techniques and the Intelligence Committee’s as torture.” The ACLU and Human Rights Watch called on AG Holder “to appoint a special prosecutor to examine the report’s allegations, but the request will almost certainly be rejected.” Stonewalling done in the name of a higher good, variously termed American Exceptionalism or now Counterterrorism, but I prefer Imperialism abroad, Social Regimentation at home.

The “folks” (Obama’s favorite term) who brought you massive surveillance of the American people, also brought you the exoneration of the CIA. Even critics fall into line. Mazzetti uses Sen. King, Independent from Maine and member of the Committee, for illustration. King first expressed skepticism about the need to release the report, then “spent five straight evenings reading it in a secure room on Capitol Hill,” and decided “the C.I.A. abuses needed a public airing.” King: “It went from interest, to a sick feeling, to disgust, and finally to anger.” Yet, the collapse of political integrity, not just of one man, but the party, the president—one might say, USG per se. For as Mazzetti observes, “And while Senator King called the Intelligence Committee’s report ‘Church Committee, II,’ he, like many other [Committee] Democrats, ... remains a broad supporter of the C.I.A.’s paramilitary mission that Mr. Obama has embraced during his time in the White House.” He grimly closes: “And as America’s spying apparatus has grown larger, richer and more powerful than during any other time in its history, it has become ever harder for those keeping watch over it.” I believe this contempt for oversight translates downward through the entire social structure, hence the police turning their backs on Mayor de Blasio, in contemptuous disregard for placing checks on “paramilitary operations” (what police functions are increasingly coming to represent) in the military-style maintenance of order, location no longer specified, each fighting force to its own bailiwick.

My New York Times Comment on the Mazzetti article, same date, follows:

When an anti-democratic cancer arises in the Republic, using the US Constitution for toilet paper, you don’t change it, you ABOLISH it—exterminate it as a threat to the very definition of democracy.

America has faced a choice since the days of the Church Committee, a test of honor, and it has failed the test miserably. From Angleton through Casey to, now, Brennan, it has been one long slog in fascistic hidden government.

The chief democratic political principle is ACCOUNTABILITY. By that token, whatever happens in USG, here, torture, waterboarding, drone assassination—all acknowledged war crimes—goes directly up to the president. The conclusion: Pres. Obama is a war criminal, no DOJ eloquence, no silver-tongued public intellectuals, can distort that unvarnished truth.

Therefore, as a war criminal, he has committed treason against a democratic America and should be discharged from office for treasonous conduct. Again, unvarnished truth. And then, unceremoniously handed over to the International Criminal Court.

America must live by the rule of law, or it is nothing. We've had decades of subterfuge, promoting a standard from which we exempt ourselves as a nation. When you compare Gerald Ford and Barack Obama, you see at once this is not a partisan issue—save that there are few around of either party with Ford's integrity, Democrats today, in particular, basking in torture and assassination as get-out-of-jail cards to show their patriotism.

America rudderless in a sea of infamy.

JANUARY 1, 2015

### **Oh, Those Nasty Russians**

Oh, those nasty Russians. Putin and his national-security advisers sitting around on Terror Tuesdays with their hit lists, planning drone assassinations thousands of miles away. Oh, those nasty Russians, with their black sites, renditions, and enhanced interrogation techniques of torture, water-boarding, sensory deprivation, rectal feeding, electronic stimulation, guided by blue-ribbon psychologists. Oh, those nasty Russians, their National Security Agency spying on the Russian people through the massive surveillance of their emails and telephone calls. Oh, those nasty Russians, their defense budget as large or larger than that of all other nations combined. Oh, those nasty Russians, forming regional alliances, providing military aid, conducting joint military maneuvers intended to confront-intimidate-threaten their adversaries both East and West. Oh, those nasty Russians, their Central Intelligence Agency functioning as a secret government engaged worldwide in regime change, subversion, sponsored-NGO propaganda activities. Oh, those nasty Russians, busily modernizing their nuclear arsenal in the name of nuclear reduction of forces. Oh, those nasty Russians, involved in two wars, Iraq and Afghanistan, and numerous other skirmishes over the last several decades. Oh, those.... Hey, wait-a-minute, that's us, not them—in every single particular, and then some, from the threatened veto in the UN Security Council to prevent the Palestinians from having their independent state to the Pacific-first strategy, battleships, carrier-groups, long-range aircraft, nuclear-capable, to contain, isolate, deconstruct China.

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In an interview with Mimi Rosenberg on WBAI New York, Dec. 31, I discussed the topic, based on my CP article, "Turned Backs: The Mayor and the Police," (Dec. 30), The Police and the Liberal Totalitarian State. We didn't get very far (a 15-minute segment), but her very sharp knowledge, as an attorney for the Legal Aid Society, of New York police affairs, in our pre-broadcast conversation the night before, convinced me of the still further limits of liberalism, in this case, what de Blasio as mayor represents in the overall financial-and-gentrification picture of New York, particularly his appointment of Bratten as police commissioner, "Broken Windows" policy and all. This encouraged me to press my thinking further on the nature of the State in America. Originally, I saw the turned backs as a vivid image of fascistic tendencies directed against a liberal mayor whose rhetoric and policies offended NYPD. Now, more pessimistic, I conclude that even the local political-ideological spectrum, in conformance with the national, has shifted rightward, center-Right the best one can

presently hope for to Patrick Lynch's wannabe Gestapo, focused on the minor—if that—infractions of blacks as part of the “Broken Windows” strategy of zero tolerance to any and all misdemeanors, from riding a bike in the wrong direction on bike paths to spitting in public. ARREST: a totalization of social control in the name of Law and Order. This, with the good, compassionate mayor's blessing.

Immediately I thought of Obama, with Brennan the functional analogue of Bratten, DCIA as titular head of the totalization of repression (sharing authority, of course, with the head of the NSA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, top Pentagon officials, FBI director, Members of Congress on a bipartisan basis who enable, support, and defend the militarization of American culture, and the president himself, busily multitasking in pursuing a menacing foreign policy, protecting the war criminals in his and in preceding administrations, authorizing the flagrant disregard of the rule of law, from prosecutions of whistle-blowers under the Espionage Act to keeping in place a detention system which creates an underclass (predominantly racial in character) while sabotaging the social safety net causing hardship enough to fill that underclass.

All this in mind, let's look at liberal totalitarianism (as per Mitzi Rosenberg's suggestion)—first, a brief definition: the pursuit of global hegemony under cover of humanitarian rhetoric, and the consequent realignment of domestic society, the social regimentation of the people to encourage complicity and noninvolvement, to that end, global hegemony abroad, its corollary, the stage of advanced capitalism at home, stabilized through industrial and financial monopolization of the economic system, enjoying the full protection of government. What has this to do with the police in New York and through much, but emphatically not all, of America? What I termed the percolation of tyranny downward, in the article, might best be termed here, the replication of authoritarianism at every level of American society, and its permeation of the entire culture, if the system is to be made to work. Sustained expansion, commercial-financial-ideological via the militarization of American life, requires nothing less or short of this.

To take a closer look: Government embodies the State (I speak not abstractly but with specific reference to the US), but when government can act with IMPUNITY, whether on behalf of perceived national-security needs or to further promote the business system, as in deregulation and a favorable tax structure, as well as the accompanying show of force in foreign markets, we have the context for and the seeds of Fascism. Impunity, the recognizable form primarily in foreign policy, but analysis cannot stop there and must reckon the impact of foreign on domestic policy, the two, I hold, being inseparable.

If government embodies the State, the CIA, especially from a moral standpoint, embodies government, is, by its very existence, made possible by the structure and institutional arrangements of government, which brings it into being, protects it, defines its mission, and provides it a REFUGE, free from oversight and scrutiny. Why would government, which spawned to serve the interests of the State and its ruling groups, want to restrain and/or supervise its activities? Concretely, we know that Brennan is among Obama's closest advisers, and that the CIA enjoys his special affection—both seen in the way he has responded to the Senate Intelligence Report on Torture, at one, in his refusal to prosecute the culprits, “let's turn the page” in the spirit of patriotism, and his longer-term refusal to prosecute those guilty of torture (and those authorizing it, beginning with Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld) in the previous administration.

This exemption of torture from the law, international and, hopefully for those in power, national, raises it to a higher realm of authority, immaculate, untouched or rather unhampered by human hands, once more State impunity so far in defiance of moral understanding and the Social Good as to signify a central place in government. Torture, in strict logic, given its status, itself accorded through non-recognition of its illegitimacy (since already its existence is well-known), is emblematic, along with the American eagle, in representing the American people and society. Some things which should be thought verboten, yet torture is not one of them.

Who, aside from the Executive branch (including DOJ) and the military and intelligence communities, accords these traits—torture, assassination, etc.—a higher authority? Well, for one, the people, who remain complicit in their practice, astonishingly, not even guilt-ridden, which speaks volumes about the moral vacuum now characterizing the American polity. But in addition, there is the history of the nation, which legitimates intervention, covert operations for regime change, political-ideological-commercial-financial penetration of other nations and whole regions, all of which necessitate the formal or informal use of force As A NATURAL RIGHT, to which one inescapably must add a tincture of racism, certitude, and arrogance as self-justifying psychological tools for assuring self-righteousness in the promotion of hegemony abroad, quietude at home.

The political culture, history, but the further element according not only the aforementioned traits but America itself a higher authority, not often identified as such, part of the protective cultural obfuscation growing exponentially out of America's needs and conduct, is the national political economy: capitalism. Capitalism, perhaps to heightened degree in America, given its puristic systemic form (uncomplicated by feudalism, unlike Europe and Japan in its historical development), breeds through its workings, as in the unrestrained accumulation of capital, a certain cynicism toward the law unless working to the advantage of the society's ruling groups, themselves making and interpreting the laws of the land consistent with their propertied interests and status concerns. In this case, privatization trumps not only regulation but the health and environmental needs of the community. (Pairing privatization and torture in a modern dialectic of forces would be an interesting subject of study.) In so doing, we see age-old constitutional standards thrown to the winds, no longer honored, no longer able to withstand the pressures of private interests.

Capitalism, too, is a highly relevant starting point for viewing the nature of the American State, beyond its nurturing requirements of markets, inordinately determining the international financial structure, etc., and providing the military underpinnings for these and other goals, often counterrevolutionary in spirit and character because required to fend-off challenges to US capitalist supremacy. For capitalism also breeds a condition of alienation and moral EMPTINESS, its commodity-structure both obliterating intrinsic human regard for others, even their—and one's own—defining characteristic of humanity, and, on the behavioral level, prioritizing self-interest, self-indulgence, and material success (as the test of human character and standing in the community), in each case anaesthetizing the individual and leading to the denial and disavowal of the general good. Not the happiest historical-social context for bringing a society under the rule of law, and more particularly, the rule of law as defined, codified, enforced by a democratic people. Torture, accorded place in the American value system and ideological arsenal for the perpetuation of its hegemonic place in the world, is therefore not happenstance, but follows almost prosaically.

A final question: what is the glue which holds together this nation, possessed of its own importance (to the extent of claiming Exceptionalism as its national/natural birthright), as a social

system, integrating it for further systemic tightening and development? First, on political-economic coordination, a structural point, the interpenetration of business and government. To this extent, both government and the State are misnomers, because their inner core, for America, is in fact capitalism, neither of the other two even intelligible otherwise. Here we see the process of economic concentration (which also comes down to the concentration of wealth and, in America its corollary, POWER) administered by and realized through a compliant government which sees its first and primary obligation not to the people but to the business system, its not their welfare. Monopolism, deregulation, the imposition of foreign trade agreements, manipulation of financial and industrial assets, all familiar tools in the government's basket of support for US business interests. But more, interpenetration inclines government, in its service to business, to adopt militaristic ways both in pushing outward and in ensuring internal stability. We have not seen the last of strikebreaking at home, especially where the national interest—defense industries—is concerned. Nor, the more generic form of strikebreaking, where popular movements, whether of antiwar or racial empowerment, are involved.

The militarization of the police, which led me to the present topic, provides illustration of the repression furnished by government in the name of Order. And Order, to move from interpenetration to a second integrative factor, is intimately related, still speaking of structure, to hierarchy, both conditions of which suggest the thrust toward Fascism, as clearly evidenced in the historical-structural development of Germany and Italy, the line all but erased between the State and business, and the role of hierarchy in defining class arrangements, deference to authority, and the general culture. In practice, the people are habituated to thinking and behaving in terms of graded rankings, superior and inferior, which undergirds racism and, as well, respect to be shown to authority figures and to the wealthy of society. Habituation is perhaps another name for societal glue and structural integration. This helps to account for everyday disciplining of the lower classes (the US is not a middle-class society, by any stretch of the imagination), and also serves to explain the general mood in society of complacency, apathy, surrender of one's life and future to the wishes and dictates (here, read "guidance") of others. Societal regimentation, in broad, keeps society functioning, allegedly prospering, and in good order—and keeps Authority on its toes.

This I believe takes us full circle to NYPD officers with turned backs, even on one close to them on all essentials.

JANUARY 2, 2015

### **Palestinian Quest for Justice**

US/Israel (a singular entity here given shared policies, geopolitical vision, and militarism) are livid and are threatening strong reprisals because Abbas has applied for membership to the International Criminal Court in consequence of Israel's manifest unwillingness, fortified by American security guarantees and military assistance, to engage in meaningful peace negotiations leading to an independent Palestinian state. Decades of stalling, forcible eviction (ethnic cleansing), settlement construction, blockades, walls, checkpoints, daily humiliation—and Palestinians finally have said, enough, freedom not only delayed but cynically spit upon by an overpowering, unrestrained Military State convinced it has the right to act with impunity because of its superior force. Israel does not even offer a moral justification for its actions; its armed forces, tanks, planes,

shells, determination to use them at whatever human cost to have its way, marks the high degree of ruthless consistency for which, in this uneven struggle, Palestinians with their feeble rockets and tunnels cannot offer effective resistance. I watch, and think of the Spanish Civil War, although even that parallel (the Nazi Stukas versus the IDF airstrikes in Gaza) is inexact in light of the helplessness of the Palestinian people murdered and displaced before the eyes of an indifferent world.

The carnage wrought serves as backdrop for the US/Israel vindictive drive to punish the Palestinians and Abbas for turning for remedy to the Hague Court. Why the resistance? Before the bar of world opinion, US/Israel, once the facts are set out, will stand indicted for war crimes, and in more practical terms, now prosecutable before an international tribunal. No, Obama, Netanyahu, their respective decision-makers in repression, will not stand in the box to be cross-examined or hear the verdict rendered; they will, as expected of the powerful, go scot-free, as will their predecessors and successors, free to embark on the seemingly endless political-economic-ideological sport of Slaughter of the Innocents, until, if ever, the balance of world power permanently shifts in a democratic direction. For Palestinians, the ICC in world terms is an incremental step, but for US/Israel it is a horrendous assault on self-proclaimed prerogatives of power as custodians of the established order of things. In a way, we are right back to Vietnam, what is essentially a counterrevolutionary posture opposed to self-determination wherever and whenever it conflicts, as usually happens, with US hegemonic goals (and they are universal and demanding), Israel being an apt pupil of the US in following through on that conflict, sharpening its own hegemonic claws when self-determination strikes closer to home.

Abbas, heretofore taken for granted as a moderate-to-insipid leader, has been transformed literally in the last few days, first, his unsuccessful appeal to the Security Council on ending the Israeli occupation (the new membership will force the US to use its veto when the Council convenes, bribes, personal calls by Obama and Netanyahu to kept leaders, as just happened, no longer availing, thus exposing the US to public admission of its bias toward Israel and lack of sympathy for ALL oppressed peoples), and now, his direct move for ICC membership, with the result of his being demonized as practically himself a terrorist, therefore repudiated, and rendered politically unacceptable. All because he seeks legal redress for the grievances of his people. US/Israel, significantly, both refusing to join the Court (nor presumably willing to accept its jurisdiction in the trial of war crimes), have thumbed their noses on international justice per se—ordinarily sufficient evidence for raising a howl and declaring them pariah states. This, too, will not happen.

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Exercising rights by seeking juridical remedies through adjudication of a recognized court system then becomes subversion of world order, and is vociferously castigated by the party at wrong—or rather, if not, why then prevent the process from working? Instead, US/Israel, as seen in Jodi Rudoren's New York Times article, "Palestinians Set to Seek Redress in a World Court," (Jan. 1), have arranged punitive measures to deter or cancel the effect of Abbas's action of joining the ICC. She recognizes this move has momentous consequences, "opening a new front in the Middle East conflict that could lead to war-crimes prosecutions of Israeli officials and that risk severe sanctions from Washington and Jerusalem." Of the two, my interest is the latter, an absolutistic defiance in response to a subjugated people's desire for nationhood. In the circumstances, decades

of abuse, that desire is minimal yet totally disparaged. To squeeze the life out of the Palestinians, should have, but to all indications has not, engendered feelings of guilt among Israelis.

Abbas, a rather tragic figure in having miscalculated Israel's will to reach an accommodation, even one that is unjust, plaintively stated—perhaps at the end of his tether—as he signed the Rome Statute (ICC's founding charter): “There is aggression practiced against our land and our country, and the Security Council has let us down—where shall we go? We want to complain to this organization [ICC]. As long as there is no peace, and the world doesn't prioritize peace in this region, this region will live in constant conflict. The Palestinian cause is the key issue to be settled.” Eloquent words, to which Jeff Rathke of the State Department pronounced to chilling effect, “counterproductive,” pushing the parties further apart. “It is an escalatory step [the simple step of joining a UN body, as opposed to Israeli bombing and shelling to the saturation point, and directed to civilian targets—presumably not an escalatory step] that will not achieve any of the outcomes most Palestinians hoped to see for their people.” The momentum had to be stopped, have faith in a nonexistent process: “Actions like this are not the answer. Hard as it is, all sides need to find a way to work constructively and cooperatively together to lower tensions, reject violence and find a path forward.” So much for US good offices, neutrality, the goal of peace. As Rudoren notes, “Israel and the United States have promised to respond harshly to the move.”

Khalil Shikaki, director of a policy-oriented think tank in Ramallah, observed: “There is no question mark as to what are the consequences, that there will be immediate American and Israeli financial sanctions. Those sanctions will gradually become more and more crippling, and this could indeed be the beginning of the end of the P.A. They fully realize that.” Unified US/Israeli actions, if doubts remained, intended to crush, not negotiate with, the Palestinians, still less join the International Criminal Court themselves and present their case in open court. Beyond financial pressures Rudoren refers to the March 17 Israeli elections, in which Netanyahu and his party, viewing the move to the ICC as “an aggressive unilateral act,” are just waiting to smear the Palestinian authority (traditional McCarthyism brought up to date), in which Netanyahu, matching stride with Naftali Bennett all the way, threatens reverse-prosecution via guilt by association using an exaggerated image of Hamas: “It is the Palestinian Authority—which is in a unity government with Hamas, an avowed terrorist organization that, like ISIS, perpetrates war crimes—that needs to be concerned about the International Criminal Court in the Hague.”

Poor Abbas, practically a member of ISIS, along with the Palestinian people, but why stop? Netanyahu accuses Palestinians, to all intents powerless, of trying to turn the tables on Israel, its full-scale conquest, thereby sanctioning Israeli all-out TOTAL warfare against them: “We will take steps in response, and we will defend the soldiers of the I.D.F. [Israel Defense Forces]. We will rebuff this additional attempt to force diktat on us, just like we rebuffed the Palestinian appeal to the U.N. Security Council.” Proud of obstructing the path to lawful protest, he then, by using the word diktat [Webster's Ninth Collegiate, “a harsh settlement unilaterally imposed (as on a defeated nation)”), turns upside down the power of the opposing forces, creating a political-ideological matrix for justifying the extermination of the putative Enemy. No expectation of peaceful negotiations from that quarter, the US fully applauding the charade.

The fix is on, Go after Abbas, threaten to drag him before the Court (in the hope he will desist). Shurat HaDin, an Israeli legal group, has already “filed war-crimes complaints” against Hamas at The Hague, and Abbas sees the handwriting on the wall, that he and PA officials will be next. This

is not far-fetched in light of the Israeli spirit of vindictiveness (driven by desperation of the long-term consequences of their actions?—mine). Ah, Bennett, on bringing Abbas before the ICC: “Someone who has terrorism smeared all over his head should not stand in the sun.” The poetics of oppression neatly put. Wednesday, Dec. 31, saw several demonstrations in Gaza, one Gazan saying, in somber tones: “I’m here today to express my love for Palestine. I want to see Gaza in a new year that has some kind of stability and peace.” Is that asking too much?

My New York Times Comment on the Rudoren article, same date, follows:

That the US and Israel refuse to join the International Criminal Court speaks volumes about their stonewalling the investigation and prosecution of their own war crimes. This contempt for international law has not a MORAL leg to stand on, and is only implemented through force. Abbas is castigated for seeking the redress of grievances through authoritative legal action. Think of it: denying the right of the victim to go to Court—a throwback to a preconstitutional Middle Ages, or more recent, the mentalset of Nazi Germany. Punish the victim. Destroy his identity. Make his life insufferable. Threaten him with worse (the March 17 Israeli elections to return a still harsher, militaristic, self-righteous regime), all of which because finally he seeks legal remedy.

This contempt for the ICC, arm-twisting of EU, threatened economic strangulation of the Palestinians hardly speaks to democracy, freedom, and other shibboleths invoked by Israel and America to justify their actions. The world knows better. The world detects desperation, not on Abbas’s part (as per NYT editorial heading), but that of the US and Israel, both joined at the hip, in a losing battle over the issue of HUMAN RIGHTS.

Every strategem used and/or planned to deny Palestinian statehood will ultimately backfire. The US and Israel are on the wrong side of history; Americans, Israelis, I regret to say, tyranny is out, democratic aspirations are in, as we begin the New Year of 2015. You’re being left behind.

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We are not through yet. The New York Times, in its editorial, “The Palestinians’ Desperation Move,” also Jan. 1, adds its bit of wisdom to the vilification (I don’t fault Rudoren on this score), its analysis, as in the heading, revealing a hard-bitten pro-Israel stand implying the need for still more punitive treatment of Palestinians because of their temerity—i.e., unmindful of the full weight of US/Israel power—in going to the UN. First, mock-tears for Abbas: “At nearly 80, he has to be tired and deeply frustrated with the failure of years of peace negotiations with Israel to achieve the Palestinian dream of an independent state.” But the fault lies with Hamas for the presumed impasse (better, one assumes, he should dissolve the unity arrangement if peace is to be achieved—mine), the editorial’s biting indictment characterizing Hamas, “the militant group that would rather lob missiles at Israel than recognize it,” being quite direct.

True, “prospects for a two-state solution grow dimmer by the day, with right-wing Israeli politicians opposing a Palestinian state and the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, steadily expanding settlements, making the creation of a viable Palestinian state harder.” A surprising admission by The Times, except for the fact that it immediately throws the ball in Abbas’s court, whose “actions will almost certainly make the situation worse, setting back



the cause of statehood even farther.” It is as though joining the International Court was a seismic event, unforgiveable to the last. Again, the upcoming Israeli elections, the sword of Damocles hanging over Palestinians’ heads: “By taking this tack [NYT’s trivializing the decision, as one out for a Sunday sail] before the Israeli elections, which are set for March 17, he has given Israeli hard-liners new ammunition to attack the Palestinians and reject new peace talks. And he may have set in motion the collapse of the Palestinians’ self-governing authority.”

At the risk of trying the reader’s patience, these and previous remarks are important for revealing the Israelis’ mindset, a mental texture of DENIAL readily translated into the license to act with impunity, in this case, internalized and institutionalized by The Times, but it is the quotations found in Rudoren, which the editorial so nicely complements, that bring out an underlying authoritarianism based on the powers of domination to liberate and feed, for that reason, sadistic impulses. Even an election drives home the urge to punish and degrade. This, of course, is the ugly face of militarism peeping out. The warning, “hav[ing] set in motion the collapse of the Palestinians’ self-governing authority,” shows as much empathy for peoples’ hopes and aspirations as if they were ciphers, pieces on a chess board, to be manipulated at will and ultimately discarded.

Punishment awaits: “Congress has long threatened to impose sanctions against the Palestinian Authority, including the loss of about \$400 million in annual aid, if it joined the court.” Israel, too, “could withhold tens of millions of dollars in tax remittances ... and could move more aggressively to build settlements in sensitive areas.” And Netanyahu said, “the Palestinians may now be subject to prosecution over support for Hamas.” The cards are stacked against them on practically all sides, yet dreams are not easily extinguished, particularly when they have right and justice on their side.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

Yes, punish the victims for going to Court in pursuit of justice. Why this venom directed to Abbas and the Palestinians? Why the denial of seeking peaceful redress for grievances, itself central to the rule of law and the pacific settlement of disputes in the international arena? Why wrong for Abbas to go to the ICC? The Times holds him hostage to the Israeli March elections—lest Israel turns further Right and more barbaric in its treatment of the Palestinians.

I believe, smoke out the lawless forces, here the US and Israel, who show contempt for and try (successfully) to manipulate the UN. The Times here is on the side of stifling just recourse to peace via acceptable international order and procedures. The alternative? A world ruled by FORCE, injustice, domination of the strong over the weak. NYT even seeks to warn off the EU, so that any move toward Palestinian statehood is construed as self-defeating—the victims thrown into the grave, not one of their own making.

When will Israel be brought under the power and influence of international law? Perhaps never, and therefore more Gazas, more demonization of Hamas (would there be rockets if the people could be allowed to live in peace, sans blockades, checkpoints, etc.?), more Israeli internal distortion of Torah given its militarism and hatred for the stranger. The Times was once internationally constructive; this shows otherwise, the sacrifice of principle for politicized ends.

JANUARY 5, 2015

## **Cinematic Warfare Heats Up**

From Pyongyang comes the announcement that DPRK Pictures is soon scheduled to release its new film, *The Teleprompter*, a slapstick comedy, raunchy by Asian standards, of the assassination of US president Barack Obama, using a nuclear-tipped golf ball smuggled into his bag (the caddie a double agent trained by CIA but hopelessly in love with Kim Jong-un from his picture appearing in NYT and WP) set to go off on his next golfing holiday. The suspense is relieved with comedic detours into such familiar scenes as a Tuesday night meeting of NSC members, in rapt attention to Obama and Brennan's weekly selection of candidates for drone assassination from the hit list, Obama's practicing salutes in front of a full-length mirror in preparation for his deplaning Air Force One, late-night telephone conversations with Cheney, McCain, and other ideological soul mates on how to engender and maximize support for intervention on a global scale, as well as directorial lessons on how to appear contemplative after his mind has snapped steel-shut on policies promoting War and Wall Street. Like its rival at the box office, Sony Pictures' *The Interview*, the film has been cast as a purposeful vehicle in the Cold War, in its case, however, largely in response to the other rather than in its own right initiatory. Only kidding, except that Obama has used *The Interview* as a cause célèbre, deliberately drawing out the lines of confrontation as part of a global geopolitical strategy taking North Korea as a perhaps secondary entering wedge which complements his main thrust, the Pacific-first "pivot" and Trans-Pacific Partnership for containing-isolating-neutralizing China as a world power. For the Obama administration, Ukraine in the West is the functional analogue of North Korea in the East, a way to pressure Russia into submission to US hegemonic aspirations and prevent at all costs a Sino-Russian rapprochement leading to a multi-polar power universe.

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Let's look at the US retaliatory springboard, almost as though the film had been conceived as a source of entrapment, followed by an anticipated cyberwarfare attack easily pinned on North Korea even though its origins remain unknown. Obama's timing was impeccable: his accusatory barrage sealing the conflict came almost immediately. One need not become involved in conspiracy theory here, the point being: no evidence has been forthcoming on his and USG's charges implicating North Korea. In simplest terms, we see here a RUSH TO JUDGMENT wholly unwarranted, and at the same time consistent with a history of US deceitful actions culminating in war, from the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the claims of Saddam's possessing WMD, to the staging of the coup in Ukraine. Very convenient: preplanning for intervention, then swiftly executing before charges are validated when, as with respect to Vietnam, Iraq, and Russia, it is both necessary to save face and too late to withdraw. Obama's peremptory announcement will go down in manuals of statecraft as the sure way to start wars.

Even NYT reporters David Sanger and Michael Schmidt (I say "even," because Sanger is often cast as an administration spokesman), in their article, "More Sanctions on North Korea After Sony Case," (Jan. 3), appear doubtful about the official line. They write, "The Obama administration doubled down on Friday [Jan. 2] on its allegation that North Korea's leadership was behind the hacking of Sony Pictures, announcing new, if largely symbolic, economic sanctions against 10 senior North Korean officials and the intelligence agency it said was the source of 'many of North Korea's major cyberoperations.' The actions were based on an executive order President Obama

signed on vacation in Hawaii, as part of what he had promised would be a ‘proportional response’ against the country.”

Already uncertainty is voiced: “But in briefings for reporters, officials said they could not establish that any of the 10 officials had been directly involved in the destruction of much of the studio’s computing infrastructure.” Somewhat like picking hostages at random and putting them against the wall, not exactly what one expects from one trained in constitutional law. (Nor for that matter are many of Obama’s other actions, from drone assassination to use of the Espionage Act to silence whistleblowers to giving NSA the go-ahead on massive surveillance.) “Proportional response” is a glib phrase covering a wide swath of questionable territory. Of the 10, they report, “most seemed linked to the North’s missile and weapons sales,” two in Iran, and five, “representatives in Syria, Russia, China and Namibia.” But more, “The administration has said there would be a covert element of its response as well.” If civil liberties is not Obama’s forte, neither is government transparency. On oh so coincidental cyberwarfare against North Korea, Sanger-Schmidt are skeptical: “Officials sidestepped questions about whether the United States was involved in bringing down North Korea’s Internet connectivity to the outside world over the past two weeks.” Then we mount the see-saw, one said, the other said, yet at least the critics are not ignored.

“Perhaps the most noticeable element of the announcement,” they observe, “was the administration’s effort to push back on the growing chorus of doubters about the evidence that the attack on Sony was North Korean in origin.” This push back would not be necessary if the government presented its case; instead, it employs—befitting the National Security State—the doctrine of preserving state secrets, in other words, obfuscation, eyes-only triumphalism, Trust Us as your leaders. Obama had on December 19 said flat out, “North Korea engaged in this attack,” and Sanger-Schmidt in partial extenuation write that “several cybersecurity firms,” though registering doubt, attributed Obama’s statement to his having “been misled by American intelligence agencies that were too eager to blame a longtime adversary and allowed themselves to be duped by ingenious hackers skilled at hiding their tracks.” Whether the firms offered this explanation or the reporters had given Obama a free pass is a moot point. They continue, The critics “do not have a consistent explanation of who might have been culpable,” e.g., “corporate insiders or an angry former employee,” which Sony’s CEO denies, or “outside hacking groups,” but the interesting point is that, for the government, the discussion is shrouded in secrecy, i.e., stonewalling: “Both the F.B.I. and Mr. Obama’s aides used the sanctions announcement to argue that the critics of the administration’s decision to attribute the attack to North Korea have no access to classified evidence that led the intelligence agencies, and Mr. Obama, to their conclusion.”

Access? Transparency? Even the spokesman remains anonymous: “‘We remain very confident in the attribution,’ a senior administration official who has been at the center of the Sony case told reporters in a briefing that, under guidelines set by the White House, barred the use of the briefer’s name.” If, as the reporters note, “the administration is clearly stung by the comparisons” to Bush’s “reliance on faulty intelligence assessments about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction before the 2003 American-led invasion of the country,” still, officials have a ready reply, “continu[ing] to insist that they cannot explain the basis of the president’s declaration without revealing some of the most sensitive sources and technologies at their disposal.” Talking tough against an adversary, based on a foundation contradicting the tenets of a democratic society. Still worse, Obama’s

declaration of sanctions is purposely made to be open-ended, leaving cyberwarfare behind and targeting anyone or anything found displeasing about North Korea—this of course after having already put in place a rigorous sanctions regime for decades.

Hence, why stop with the Pyongyang Ten (apologies to the Hollywood Ten, the odor of McCarthyism still strong) because we haven't yet heard from Treasury: "In another sign of how Mr. Obama was seeking to punish individual leaders, the executive order he signed gives the Treasury Department broad authority to name anyone in the country's leadership believed to be involved in illicit activity, and to take action against the Workers' Party, which has complete control of North Korea's politics." Surreptitious, the widened scope for sanctions no longer geared to the alleged offense, as though Obama's under-the-covers-wet-dream about regime change, to which, as now with Cuba, but in every way, he appears to be obsessed. Treasury Secretary Lew, maybe more interventionist-oriented than Geithner, himself too busy placating the banks, is emerging as a financial John Brennan. Lew's statement "suggested that the sanctions were intended not only to punish North Korea for the hacking of Sony... but also to warn the country not to try anything like it again."

Overkill is the name of the game. Lew is a fascinating study, his gift for generalizing economic warfare is perfect for that side of Obama's hegemonic/counterrevolutionary offensive, complementing the military side: "Today's actions are driven by our commitment to hold North Korea accountable for its destructive and destabilizing conduct. Even as the F.B.I. continues its investigation into the cyberattack against Sony Pictures Entertainment, these steps underscore that we will employ a broad set of tools to defend U.S. businesses and citizens, and to respond to attempts to undermine our values or threaten the national security of the United States.'" Maybe to live up to that billing, undermining our values, threatening our national security, North Korea should put into production The Teleprompter, the clash of two worlds via movie projectors! We have already so trivialized international politics by our insatiable appetite for market penetration, militarization of foreign policy, global ideological saturation, that why not go the one step further, world conflagration over a miniscule thing like a movie? Obama seems ready.

The writers' sense, if not that outcome, at least the problematic nature of open-ended sanctions: "Beyond the initial sanctions, the power of the president's order might come from its breadth and ITS USE IN THE FUTURE [my caps.]. One senior official said the order would allow the Treasury to impose sanctions on any person who is an official of the North Korean government or of the Worker's Party or anyone judged 'controlled by the North Korean government' or acting on its behalf." For a nation that has hacked into Iran's nuclear facilities, yet demands US business is on sacred ground, hypocrisy is the least charge coming to one's mind.

My New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

Obama is an apt pupil. No coincidence Brennan is his closest adviser. This exercise in PUBLIC DIPLOMACY goes back to Reagan, Casey, the CIA and the Office of Public Diplomacy: to manipulate the media, Congress, and the American public. Casey to Brennan to a willing Obama, not misled by his intelligence agencies but exercising leadership, as much as his predecessors, in keeping alive, indeed thriving on, a New Cold War.

Pathetic how USG officials must remain anonymous in their briefings—a condition acceptable to NYT and a supine press—as they spread propaganda (the function of public

diplomacy) about a North Korea attack on Sony. Even more outrageous, Obama pleads state-secrets when asked to come up with proof of NK involvement: his despising of government transparency should by now be well known, as well his extremism in US foreign policy, a president who will go down in history for armed drone assassinations.

This carefully orchestrated campaign (its antecedents in the Reagan Iran-Contra affair) still has not presented evidence, and smacks of a new offensive: add NK to the Obama administrations studied confrontation, practically looking for war, with Russia and China. At the very least, NK fits well with Obama's Pacific-first strategy, coupled with TPP, to contain and isolate China.

Obama's closeness to the CIA, its ideology, covert operations, pathological ethnocentrism, is clearly evidenced by his quick (Dec. 19) charge of NK responsibility. Evidence?

JANUARY 8, 2015

### **Self-Determination and Cuba**

Capitalism is a system founded on repression. The enclosure movement in 17th-century England, even the mercantilist pre-capitalist foundations paving the way, both transitional to capitalism in its modern form, necessitated force, the State as accomplice in achieving wealth accumulation and further class-differentiation, a new epoch therefore in defining relationships of power that assumed and facilitated the exploitation of what would become, in one case, colonial dependencies, and in the other, a working class dependent on those in possession of property. That much is or should be familiar to all: hierarchy, surplus value, the institutional (and ideological) preservation of order. Subordination, whether directed to other nations or industrial laborers in domestic society, becomes integral to capitalist development, a non-negotiable condition for achieving maximum capital accumulation and the uncontested structure of authority. To this extent the political-moral equation of capitalism=democracy=freedom is baloney pure and simple.

The point is relevant to the wider historical performance and status of capitalism in relation to socialism. And therefore, relevant to the discussion of Cuba as a nation and political economy. Unlike capitalism, socialism has never had the historical opportunity to experience autonomous development freed from intervention, outside pressures to capitulate, support of indigenous forces of subversion. With socialism historically came capitalist counterrevolution, as in the case of the Siberian Intervention following World War I, establishing a pattern in which capitalism, chiefly the US, has been unrelenting in anticipating then destroying not only alternative patterns of modernization and political economy, but also their hint of germination and/or success, even as social-democratic versions of capitalism itself. Our way or the highway, buttressed now by international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, is the reigning formula, the proviso of force always present in reserve.

Capitalism posits no compromise, no spirit of structural-ideological reconciliation, no comity of political economies (to paraphrase the idea of a comity of nations: courtesy, friendship, mutual recognition), and instead, a systemic SOLIPSISM, one grounded ultimately in fear of social change, of democratization, of the very concept of alternative formations per se. Market fundamentalism, the Washington Consensus, deregulation, monopoly, cartels, international financial controls, all

(and more) define a US-sponsored and –implemented context of operations which greets any departures as a grievous affront to national honor and possible grounds for war. Cuba has been in the American cross-hairs for 56 years, 7 days, 15 hours (at time of writing), a bipartisan obsession which confirms the psychopathology of insecurity and ideological rigidity of capitalism in America as the frivolous combination of militarism and consumerism, as prone to collapse in case intervention, humongous military appropriations, neocolonialism in trade-and-investment activities and penetration, and more subtly, the false consciousness of working people, racial minorities, the poor in general, should abate, no longer operate, in confirming American power and the pursuit of global hegemony.

If, as I suggest, the secret of capitalism is its FEAR, of others, internal collapse, overcompensation for producing alienation, class antipathies, emptiness in the labor process, a fear therefore of being found out as inhumane, it follows that Cuba becomes a special case of its (again specifically here, American) posture of world Reaction, the tenacious holding on, with the West as a whole, to a hereinbefore status quo of global domination. Now America, in spite of capitalistic fragments/trends in Russia, China, and even Cuba, believes itself besieged and seeks undisputed leadership of international capitalism, the role of custodian of the system, which works to strengthen an already ingrained ethnocentrism (the Other as stranger, adversary, socialist) placing fear-of-difference foremost on the historical agenda. What, Cuba? We eat countries like that for breakfast, and crush them if they resist.

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I have suspected America's response to the Cuban Revolution from Day One because it was already clear that the Cold War in large and the specific interventions beginning with the containment purpose of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan was to destroy world possibilities of alternative social-economic formations posing an ideological challenge to capitalism, American and worldwide. Contempt for the aspirations of subjugated peoples (initially here, the reaffirmation of colonialism, which then broadened out to postcolonial military intervention and domination) inspired anticommunism, rationalized the use of power, and became entrenched in the American mindset. Cuba never stood a chance. The Bay of Pigs was inscribed in Kennedy's very demeanor and deepest convictions. West Berlin and Havana were alike "Ich bin"-landscape for displaying the might and moral values of American freedom, the imposition of US capitalism on the rest of the world. For some, Batista was and still is Cuba's George Washington.

I have written on the seeming US-Cuban rapprochement, but return here because angered by the NYT article by William Neuman, "On the Open Road, Signs of a Changing Cuba," (Jan. 7), in which he implies that the rotten apple of socialism is falling from the Cuban tree being nourished by the root system of capitalism and entrepreneurial waters of freedom. Cuba is an open-air museum of 1950s cars. Period. His interviews are with those who declare with pride their desire for making money, not a single voice on behalf of the revolution—a not unexpected slant given The Times's coverage of Cuba over the years in perfect synchronization with US efforts at destabilization and regime change. Perhaps because of proximity, but also because of determined leadership, the willingness of the nation to hold its ground vis-à-vis America, and not least, its actual achievements in the face of great odds, Cuba is more than an easily caricatured Third World country to US policy makers—a living refutation of US counterrevolution and unrestrained wealth accumulation, imperatively to be made over in America's image or destroyed in the process. Rampaging

ethnocentrism is hardly irrational—reminders of America’s own shortcomings are not wanted. The system cannot face itself in the mirror, the ugliness of war, intervention, a wholly inadequate safety net, social regimentation of an underclass, massive surveillance of one and all, what looks back in the reflection is absolute denial, celebration of strength and power, and moral obtuseness.

Neuman gets in his digs. E.g.,: “‘This house for sale.’ That concept did not exist, legally, before 2011, when home sales were first allowed under changes designed to inject some capitalist life into the country’s creaky socialist economy.” Again, “There were also discouraging signs: One was the lack of little bars on my phone, showing that there was no cellular coverage in the areas between cities, an indication of Cuba’s backward telecommunications network.” Also, “While there was little car and truck traffic, there was a lot of everything else. Sharing the highway with us were bicycles, oxcarts, tractors, motorcycles (some with sidecars) and horsecarts of every type”—oh what poor benighted slobs. And the car Neuman toured in: “The odometer was stuck at 26948.0. How many times had it turned over before freezing? Cuba, too, is frozen in the past.” I am tempted to say, America is frozen in the future, one of endemic, permanent war; societal divisiveness; the perishing of, to use a New Deal phrase, the national estate. With this in mind, I wonder what socialism would be like, in Cuba or anywhere else, if it were allowed to develop unvarnished and undisturbed? Precisely that question cannot be asked, lest it reveal capitalism as the imposter, the counterfeit, of human freedom.

My New York Times Comment on the Neuman article, same date, follows:

Neuman’s article reeks of condescension. Older Times readers will recall Ruby Phillips sitting in her Nacional hotel room 1959-60 spewing propaganda. Why this hostility, demonization (Fidel), denunciation (socialism), while discounting a half-century of USG embargo, blockade, CIA paramilitary operations, international financial squeeze? Cuba’s capitalist signs might well have organically developed—yet NGOs interference, constant pressures, make this distorted, contrived, imposed from without. Is capitalism that shaky that it requires assistance to be acceptable?

Yes, I’ve been to Cuba (2002) and Cubans indeed lived close, but they had DIGNITY, befitting a beautiful people and land, art and music in the air, a vibrant education system, medical care, medical research. Your contempt reveals the shallowness of corporatism-militarism defining US society and political culture. I visited a synagogue—the shamas saying, no discrimination; a oneroom schoolhouse in the Mountains, students in blue-and-white eagerly responding, a curtain behind, one-on-one instruction in computers.

Obamian rapprochement is intended as a kiss of death. It will not work. Nor will simultaneous upgrading of sanctions on Venezuela, part of the same policy. If Cuba grows more capitalistic, while NOT sacrificing its achievements in health and education, its spirit of caring for one another, that must be their decision. Ridicule, further subversion, turning loose Miami-Cuban hatemongers won’t work

JANUARY 9, 2015

## **After Paris, Transposing Europe and America**

Freedom of thought-expression-publication/presentation (for each is part of a unitary process starting from the free individual's mind and entering an uncensored public domain) is the cherished tradition helping to define a democratic society and giving credence to the sacredness of Ideas as perhaps best dignifying the human spirit—but it is not an ABSOLUTE right. Liberals may rally around the standard, in its most persuasive form, in John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty." But radicals cannot and should not, because the community as such also has rights which must be respected, explained, and cogently defended. I share with millions the heartache over the murders of the Charlie Hebdo massacre and deplore these acts, no matter what might be charged against France, Europe, and the West in their treatment of the Muslim world. Cold-blooded murder is never justified, whatever the perpetrators believe are grounds of provocation and redemption.

Satire is not license for self-justifying defamation of character, whether of a religious leader (as in this case an act deeply hurtful to the follower, with inevitable spill-over to the religion itself), or of a leader of a nation, also in an adversarial context (surprisingly throughout the discussion of Charlie Hebdo, no mention is made of Sony Picture's "The Interview," which possibly raises more serious consequences, leading to a nuclear stand-off and impending war). Am I suggesting there are limits to political satire, and beyond that to free speech in general? Reluctantly, yes, mindful that imposing such limits could be as abusive and totalitarian as the converse situation, the societal-cultural damage to whole peoples if such "freedom" is left unrestrained. Regrettably, then, there are no satisfying standards for reaching a determination, but incitement, gratuitous slander, callous disregard for the sentiment of the community (WITHOUT in any way exonerating acts of reprisal: murder is murder, twisted minds are twisted minds) must be recognized as more than exhibiting bad or questionable taste; they violate the rights of others. Too, in practical terms (yes, there is a real as opposed to metaphysical world, one I hold is the province of the radical, the other, the refuge of the liberal), needless provocation—the case here as well as with "The Interview"—while titillating to the cognoscenti produces conflict that would cost human lives.

In France, we are not reliving the Dreyfus Affair, nor are Hollande's words, which I appreciate in the abstract because in fact expressing eloquently humane sentiments, really true to the mark, in light of France's own history of colonialism and subjugation of peoples under its control—as well as dutifully following the US lead in Iraq and Afghanistan, its NATO membership, etc. To repeat: my unequivocal condemnation of the slayings of Charlie Hebdo staff and police officers, yet the surrounding context is not what it should be, democratic top to bottom—and therefore France, Europe, the West, especially given the treatment of the Muslim population and rising hate-incidents, do not come to the episode with completely clean hands. And the case against satire-with-impunity holds equally with respect to the US, the assassination of Kim, however jocular the setting, does extend beyond bad taste, almost as though part of the underlying psychopathology of looking for war. Had there been internal criticism of the Muhammad caricature in France, or that of Kim in America, at least those on the receiving end could be assured of internal debate and disagreement, rather than a near-unanimity of glee and cynicism, to be interpreted as a preliminary attack on THEIR independence and security. Is no one in either country at all regretful at the glibness, meanness, in depicting—in true ethnocentric flair—a cartoonish Other?

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The New York Times editorial, “The Charlie Hebdo Massacre in Paris,” (Jan. 8), reveals not soul-searching so much as the need to close ranks. It describes the “brutal terrorist attack,” quotes Hollande’s remarks, “This was an assault... on ‘the expression of freedom’ that is the ‘the spirit of the republic,’” and then, in what might be construed as scathing criticism appears rather as high praise: “The editors, journalists and cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo reveled in controversy and relished hitting nerves. The magazine’s editorial director, Stephane Charbonnier, who was killed in the attack, had scoffed at any suggestion that the magazine should tone down its trademark satire to appease anyone. For him, free expression was nothing without the right to offend. And Charlie Hebdo has been an equal-opportunity offender: Muslims, Jews, Christians—not to mention politicians of all stripes—have been targets of buffoonish, vulgar caricatures and cartoons that push every hot button with glee.” I cannot summon the same nonchalance (“an equal-opportunity offender”) as though pushing every hot button does more than mix commercialism (a special edition of one million has been announced by the survivors) and incitement.

The editorial points out Charlie Hebdo’s past history of controversy over the portrayal of Muhammad, and draws a conclusion I partly agree with: “There are some who will say that Charlie Hebdo tempted the ire of Islamists one too many times, as if cold-blooded murder is the price to pay for putting out a magazine. The massacre was motivated by hate. It is absurd to suggest that the way to avoid terrorist attacks is to let the terrorists dictate standards in a democracy.” Of course, cold-blooded murder cannot be accepted under any circumstances—and the hate-motivation for the massacre goes without saying. But what of the argument about avoidance of terrorist attacks? We have no proof, but long-standing intervention in the Middle East, US military bases in the region, wars directly against Muslim countries, subsequent treatment of refugee populations, might have causal significance in the rise of terrorism, even helping to explain 9/11; and on specific topic here, “dictat[ing] standards in a democracy,” what are they, and is absolute free speech (“buffoonish, vulgar caricatures and cartoons” calculated to offend, to think otherwise, especially the “glee” involved, being obtuseness of a high order) one of them?

The Times is right when it states, “This is also no time for peddlers of xenophobia to try to smear all Muslims with a terrorist brush.” And it rightly calls out rightist groups in French society: “It is a shame that Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front party, which has made political gains stoking anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim fears, immediately sought political advantage with talk of ‘denial and hypocrisy’ about ‘Islamic fundamentalism.’” But what of xenophobia as the ingrained ideological weaponry fueling EU-US confrontation with Russia, and the probably still deeper American xenophobia characterizing its counterrevolutionary global posture (rationalized as anti-terrorism) and confrontation with both Russia and China? Terrorist attacks are not the whole picture. That which is attacked has also attacked in its own right, with greater preponderance and for a longer time.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows, revealing, in contrast to the above, a more conflicted view because of the immediate impact of the heinous nature of the crime, and because I was struck by a parallel set of dynamics of Charlie Hebdo and “The Interview,” in which, for America, we see the soft approach of character assassination met thus far by no North Korean response, whereas for France, character assassination is met with horrendous physical assassination. Perhaps if we could dispense with assassination of all kinds from every quarter and conduct international politics with justice and toleration uppermost, this would be a better world.

Then, satire might be raised to a Swiftian level, rather than wallow in the ghoulish humor of genocidal nightmares. My NYT Comment:

The eloquent, deeply moving response of the people of France—the defense of freedom of expression as a cardinal human right—is too important to be confined as a response to the vicious murders at Charlie Hebdo. This must also be a wake-up call for the people of America, which, unlike the French, do NOT have a heightened value for the expression of free thought.

In America it is not Muslim extremists who are trying to curtail intellectual and political freedoms, it is we ourselves—not with AK rifles, but with Patriot Acts and other manifestations of thought control. I cannot imagine Pres. Obama saying what Pres. Hollande has said in defense of free thought. For Obama and AG Holder have used the Espionage Act to prevent not only freedom of discussion but also revelations of war criminality.

Imagine Americans massed in a giant public square affirming freedom of speech. To most of us, that specific freedom is not worth caring about. The whole thrust of counterterrorism is acquiescence, submission to authority, on matters increasingly far afield from the putative subject matter within its scope.

We are now the National Security State, McCarthyism Redux, to what should be our everlasting shame—and is not. I therefore reach out in solidarity with the French people who still find the freedom to think among the most precious of human gifts. Je suis... Yes, to all the critics of war, intervention, assassination, I honor you. Stand fearlessly for reason and the right.

JANUARY 12, 2015

### **America's Mad Rush to the Bottom**

US foreign policy is the country's Achilles heel. On the domestic side, it faces few challenges and can get away with pretty much what it pleases, e.g., massive surveillance, Espionage Act prosecutions to silence revelations of war crimes, taxation policies which widen inequities of income distribution, regulatory policies ditto for further concentration of wealth and power through ever-tighter monopolization, and, not least, a militarization of capitalism itself, all of which bring the domestic sector into alignment with the foreign sector, making for a ruthless machinery of political-ideological aggrandizement. No wonder the fear of the US government in the world. Trade agreements appear innocuous and the normalization of international relations; in reality, they are one-sided arrangements as part of a US-defined global power struggle, as much ideological and military as purely economic. Covert operations drive the pace of negotiations (and with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, joint military exercises with "friends and allies" facilitate greater structural closeness).

We leave foreign policy to the experts, whose credentials of anticommunism and counterrevolution are without blemish. The pattern has been uninterrupted since the close of World War Two, bi-partisan in ways more difficult to realize in domestic policy, itself more narrowly circumscribed than is admitted in public. The syncretism of the policy framework, always artificial

at best, is constantly in search of unity, so that when I speak of foreign policy this is in a sense arbitrary: advanced ground is staked out in one area, as in the pursuit of global hegemony, and brought up to the same level in the other, as in State-assisted exports, international financial stabilization, and the groundwork for commercial penetration and the security of investments. Conversely, accelerated domestic planning and performance summons the requisite changes, from intervention to general war scares, in the foreign realm. Industrial/banking accumulating resources must find satisfactory, i.e., expanding, outlets to ward off pressures endemic to capitalism of stagnation, saturation, depression.

Unlike at any time in the last 70 years, the US is running scared because the structure of world power is changing. The Cold War was a convenience every which way; simply, gather enough power to contain and stare down a single adversary, staying ahead, flexing muscle, spreading ideology, meanwhile being focused on the prevention of new players from gaining independent major-power status. The Soviet Union, by not acting as a force for world revolution, instead following closely a policy of self-interest, was a willing accomplice to a bipolar schema in which it had an assured but secondary place. All of this began to change, less because of an emboldened Russia than an awakening Third World that even Russia had to take notice of, and chiefly, the rise of China. Here we find the early fragmentation of the bipolar world, and with it, America's greater stridency, its ideological shrillness, its overtly orchestrated moves toward asserting world supremacy, whereas before this could be merely assumed.

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Come forward to today. Obama is possibly the most dangerous president, amoral from head-to-toe, in the postwar era, this through a combination of factors: his manifest lack of knowledge and experience in all areas of public policy, creating a dependence on the military and intelligence communities which has made him their uncritical spokesman, and because sharing with them the hard-nosed quest for power, in reality something of a skill for their extreme purposes (as in regime change, an unstoppable global paradigm); his unbecoming quality of opportunism, Janus-faced in disguising domestic Reaction (e.g., deregulation) and Repression (e.g., massive surveillance) in the rhetoric of liberalism and reform; most telling, his wiliness/cynicism in conducting policy across the full spectrum of issues, from environmental policy to the recent rapprochement with Cuba, in neither of these cases positions that could stand the light of day. In one particular he excels, the Executive branch becoming the nerve center for upper-class prerogatives of power, bad enough in its own right, yet, fused with militarism and hegemonic goals, the perhaps still informal foundations for a fascist state: the integration of business and military elites, an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy, and domestic order achieved through institutional supports for conformity and allegiance to the state.

Why should a changing world structure appear so menacing to America? First, the change itself is very real. While the West is in decline, largely because accepting the unqualified leadership of the US in such areas as austerity, intervention, consequent embroilment with other power blocs, a settling recognition of loss of energy, will, idealism, i.e., stuck in the same old historical tracks, when comparing itself, which cannot be helped, with newer centers of advancing civilization, primarily Asia and Latin America, this means the US must largely go-it-alone on the world scene, increasingly isolated, drawing further inward as a society while bursting outward as a global Intruder on other nations' roads to development and progress. Dr. Strangelove had already wanted

to plug into the juices to avoid structural enfeeblement, the condition already affecting much of Europe.

Menacing? America is increasingly without friends, even those who heretofore had no choice but to accept, as the condition of friendship, neocolonial policies backed by force: to wit, Latin America, which, with the fall of dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, for starters—all recipients of CIA largesse and its sponsorship of assassination squads—enables the region to turn a corner, get off its knees, assert its individual and regional autonomy with pride, to the point now of challenging the OAS framework by the organization of CELAC. What makes this new-found independence truly frightening to policy makers in America (and a parasitical US capitalism, ah, the Rockefeller Brothers of the 1950s-60s and beyond) is that it owes a great deal to China, the new *bête noir* on which we obsess, in the form of investment capital, reciprocal markets, and implied protection against US flagrant depredations. It appears this story is repeating itself on the west coast of Africa and even with market relations in Japan and Vietnam. When the vaunted, magisterial power of the US is bested at its own game, decline beckons over the horizon.

Nor under Putin is Russia a slouch in international markets. That, too, worries the US, not least in auguring a possible shift in political-economic relations, starting with Germany, pointing eastward, and therefore away from symbiotic ties with American capitalism. More disturbing, however, is Russia's own turn to the East, a seismic happening in that a Russia-China rapprochement, after decades of mutual mistrust, definitively reshapes global power arrangements: the multi-polar world to which the US cannot and will not adjust. And out of petulance, infantilism, selfishness, self-indulgence, and plain hunger for economic advantage (along with a demand for acceptance of its ideological supremacy), it very likely now becomes more militaristic, unyielding in its power quest, prone to intervention, than ever before. For me, Obama = drone assassination; but worse, he = a gut militarism, thinking he is acting in the service of American capitalism, but actually participating in its fossilization and decline on the world stage.

JANUARY 14, 2015

### **Infrastructure Trumps Militarized Capitalism**

Downward historical-structural trajectories reveal themselves by a nation's absence of will for anything but war, intervention, the disproportionate emphasis on and allocation for military spending, invariably at the expense of its people's needs and the social good. Militarism is seen, much as Viagra for the 50+ male, as the source of vigor, the means of heading off aging, in this case of a nation as it wallows in its own psychopathological emphasis on strength, virility, or speaking practically in international terms, global domination. Keeping to old ways, the recapitulation of steps taken in the past, from shock-and-awe bombing campaigns to covert actions aimed at regime change, from fine tuning tactics like drone assassination to revising grand strategies like the shift in focus from Europe to the Pacific, signifies more than a repetition-compulsion, a massive reactive formation: it signifies an inability to adjust to realities, here, on the world scene, and consequently, an urge to plunge head down dead ahead in order to stop history in its tracks and confirm a permanent hegemonic status no longer to be. The more fearful, the more belligerent, and add to that, the more ambitious, which translates into the constant mobilization of increased force. Voila, Obama's Pacific-first strategy aimed at ultimate confrontation with China.

China is America's nightmare. How many military/intelligence bed sheets are soiled in wet dreams of American conquest of China? We'll never know, given Obama's contempt for government transparency. But we have evidence before us, battle carrier groups steaming to the Pacific (assuming steaming can be used with nuclear-powered), long-range bombers nuclear capable in place, a full schedule of jointly-held military exercises with regional "friends and allies," even encouragement for rearming Japan. One can say, everything in preparatory stage—madness the US appears helpless to reverse, so gnawing are the symptoms of decline. And what of China? Has it adopted a mental-set of being imperiled? Is its national product diverted to war-planning and –production? Is its national identity bound up with conquest and the geopolitical fruits of aggression? Is it deeply immersed in a state of denial, so that not only is history become the enemy but also militarism (preferably disguised as liberal humanitarianism) the selection of choice for breaking out to a newer, less complicated splendor of wealth and power?

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Ever since childhood, I have tended to judge a society, in part, by its creative demiurge, architecture (not Speer's Nazi monumentality designed to cow the people into submission) and the projects articulated as an indicator of Community, an endeavor to achieve the societal well-being. (Painting and music would also count, of course, but my interest in aesthetic and cultural liberation—admittedly limited—took this form.) With the Sino-American comparison in mind, particularly the latter's crumbling infrastructure, on which we can all agree, I will note current developments in China as a sign of confidence in the future. By architecture, we must include engineering as perhaps its inner voice—and by infrastructure, I must admit my admiration for what the New Deal was able to achieve, infrastructure the inner voice of the nation's collective property and well-being. That private contractors rule the roost in the little done in America today, i.e., the privatization of the national estate, only confirms the decline in spirit and will to think of a separable PUBLIC realm dedicated to the people as by right theirs.

We turn, then, to China, and the excellent article by New York Times reporter David Barboza, "Projects to Make Great Wall Feel Small," (Jan. 13), which details the wave of infrastructure-concentration today in modern China. This speaks not only to planning but also national priorities, and above all to looking forward to a world freed from single-power unilateral supervision of the global system. Every mile of track laid for high-speed trains is a nail in the coffin of US categorical domination of that system. The US knows it, China knows it, the exciting race is on: can development best militarism? Let's look closer at what is happening.

Yes, there is the Shanghai Tower, now the world's second highest building, but that's not what I have in mind. China has identified key structural-economic needs, not infrastructure for its own sake. (I, like many, have consistently opposed development locally, as merely a boon to business interests, not to say contributing to environmental damage, increased traffic, overcrowding; but that is very different from infrastructure, public in character, dealing with water treatment, sewage, etc.—a useful distinction to keep in mind.) It is wrong to see China's projects as all of one cloth, pure as new-driven snow. But the good outweigh the bad, those extraneous to meeting societal needs. A foundation is being laid for national greatness in the service of the people, as for example, "divert[ing] water from the south of the country, where it is abundant, to a parched section of the north, along a route that covers more than 1,500 miles." The cost, \$80B. We see public investment of near astronomical sums on such projects.

Barboza, writing from Dalian, begins: “The plan here seems far-fetched—a \$36 billion tunnel that would run twice the length of the one under the English Channel....[as] the world’s longest underwater tunnel, creating a rail link between two northern port cities.” Infrastructure is designed to service production, in addition to servicing health, water, and other specifically communal needs. He writes further about how in Keynesian fashion (mine), as in New Deal spending to avert economic depression, China’s leaders “are moving even more aggressively [following three decades of boom conditions], doubling down on mega-infrastructure.” So we find the National Development and Reform Commission “approv[ing] plans to spend nearly \$115 billion on 21 supersize infrastructure projects, including new airports and high-speed rail lines.” Heavy debt, particularly local government debt, is being incurred, but unlike Europe and IMF-World Bank austerity measures, China appears relatively unconcerned and confident its growth would offset this indebtedness. It is not running scared, even querulous. In response to a UC, San Diego China specialist, who contended, “People should be concerned [about the indebtedness] because very few of these big projects generate cash,” the usual critique of public ownership, Barboza observes: “And yet China’s leaders are so confident of the value and necessity of building on an epic scale that engineers are mapping out plans for decades to come.”

Try that out on US engineers’ anticipated planning. In addition to Shanghai Tower and “spectacularly rich metropolis of 25 million residents,” there is the underside one takes for granted or doesn’t notice: “Undergirding the city is a patchwork of supersize infrastructure—huge airports, subway lines, sewage systems and power plants.” On the private side, throw in “the world’s largest playground, Shanghai Disney Resort, which when it opens around 2016 will be surrounded by a 225-acre Magic Kingdom-style park....” Even there, however, “a city-owned company is helping finance the project.” It would be naive to think this is all the doing of socialism—obviously, there are public-private partnerships at work, just as there are, more important, public projects intended to facilitate and buttress private enterprise in China, as with rail lines connecting port facilities (a phenomenon Paul Baran noted, in *Political Economy of Growth*, in other contexts). The point, though, is that the preponderant share of public investment still lies exclusively on the public side, and that public investment per se in China shows a determination and will to accomplish great things. “[I]n Dalian,” Barboza points out, “a city of six million in the northeast, the proposed underwater rail tunnel in Yantai is just one piece of a master plan that includes a 163-mile urban transit system..” For good measure, “work is also underway on what the city says will be the world’s largest offshore airport, a \$4.3 billion development on an artificial island created with landfill, covering more than eight square miles.”

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With China, hope, with America, anger, suspiciousness, despair. The un- and sub-conscious foundation for the Pacific-first strategy lies in humbling China, dismembering it, cutting it down to size (similar to US thinking and planning with respect to Russia, only now China taking precedence over Russia as America’s #1 adversary). Adversaries are supposed to quail, not confidently affirm the future. In both Putin and Li, Obama and the US have met their match. There may be oligarchs aplenty on the other side, but it is the fact of and underlying rationale for INFRASTRUCTURE that drives America and Obama up the wall; for it is the public factor that sticks in the capitalist craw, even when devoted to long-range private service, in that it represents a collective people providing for society’s needs. Some of what China is doing in this regard is downright stupid and short-

sighted, as in Lanzhou, where local government “has backed plans to flatten the tops of 700 low-level mountains to make way for a new business district [something the US would applaud, even boast of], despite concerns about the damage to the local ecosystem.”

Stepping back, one senses that rails and bridges best characterize the spirit of China’s development, that and of course strides in mass education and public health. E.g., he writes, on railroads, “[i]n November, the government said its freight rail link between eastern China and Spain had opened, allowing factory goods to reach Spain in just over 20 days. It is now the world’s longest rail journey, far surpassing the route of the famed Trans-Siberian Railway.” There are added gains, applicable to the entire industrial system—a shrewd observation on Barboza’s part: “China sees hidden benefits in such projects, including the ability to gain new scientific and technical expertise.” He then likens bridge-building, because of this acquisition of knowledge and expertise, to “something akin to an Olympic event” in the minds of China’s builders: “In 2007, after China completed the longest sea-crossing bridge, in Hangzhou, the nation has regularly broken records. China now has the longest bridge of any kind, the highest bridge and, in 2011, a new successor to the longest sea-crossing bridge, 26.4 miles long, in the eastern city of Qingdao.”

One Oxford specialist on mega-projects is among the few outside observers with kind words: “For China, a lot of this is about building a national identity. Mega-projects are suited for that. It’s a lighthouse for all to see what the Chinese nation can do.” Perhaps engineering imperialism, an expertise that China’s “government wants its state-owned enterprises to export.” The results: “Boston is buying subway cars from China. Argentina, Pakistan and Russia have asked China to upgrade their infrastructure. Last month, Chinese construction teams began work on an ambitious \$50 billion canal across Nicaragua that could some day rival the Panama Canal.” Better spreading infrastructure than drone assassinations and regime change. Development could become the surrogate for war and intervention, putting the US out of business altogether. Quoting a Carnegie Tech source, “They [the Chinese] have the idea that they’re going to be doing infrastructure for the rest of the world,” Barboza describes how “China is pushing the boundaries of infrastructure-building, with ever bolder proposals.” Seems bizarre to an American who can’t get the potholes fixed on local streets, but here it is: “The Dalian tunnel looks small compared with the latest idea to build an ‘international railway’ that would link China to the United States by burrowing under the Bering Strait and creating a tunnel between Russia and Alaska.”

And Obama couldn’t even get to Paris last Sunday for the Unity March.

My New York Times Comment on the article, same date, follows:

Superb engineering skills. While the US flounders in its war-intervention-deregulation obsession, China thinks of, and acts on, INFRASTRUCTURE, a contrast which will only embitter the US into more boasting, more demand for unilateral global supremacy, more torture, assassination, regime change.

China ascending, America declining—the latter with no brakes to be applied because its militarization of capitalism represents the death wish of a nation which can only measure itself in the megatonnage of destructive power.

Our cities decline, theirs rise resplendent. Our ignition defects kill people, their rail lines enable clean, efficient travel. And so the list of achievements continues, whilst in America,

and especially the White House, the demonization of China has become a cottage industry. Move over US in Latin America. Ditto globally. And one may want to tar China with the brush of Red this or that, but in truth these technological achievements have nothing to do with ideology, and rather, high educational standards and the national will to improve the lot of their people.

Will we learn from China? Obviously not. Obama's military "pivot"—his Pacific-first strategy, his shifting "assets" to the Pacific, and of course the Trans-Pacific Partnership, all have the purpose of confronting, containing, and isolating China. War is always easier than internal self-examination. Sorry, boys, it won't work. I'll take infrastructure any time.

JANUARY 16, 2015

### **Obama and Paris**

World leaders were in the front rows, arms locked as a sign of solidarity, more than one million strong marching behind. But where was the King of Counterterrorism, one who has made the issue, along with drone assassination, torture, war, intervention, massive defense spending, equally massive surveillance, deregulation, Espionage Act prosecution, support for Wall Street, all of which having been successfully made invisible, swept under the rug, the more effective the more hidden, because riding the coattails of counterterrorism itself, who appears to have ducked the limelight and not shown up in Paris? Was this a simple misstep, as the White House maintained, a quiet Sunday at home, and if so, what does that say about Obama and his use of foreign policy? And if not (although they come to the same thing), his use, then, of counterterrorism?

Our Strangelove is a gold-plated imposter, on foreign policy, inept, platitudinous, deceitful, so that to fall back on "misstep" has some truth—gross incompetence living within hermetically-sealed walls provided by uniformly reactionary national security advisers and the intelligence and military communities whose views of permanent war find ready acceptance. Obama is never misled; he is a true believer of US world hegemony. His choice of advisers, from Brennan to a miasma of liberal neo-Cons, proves the point, so that the presumed misstep is hardly that. Counterterrorist leadership is to be flaunted, not shared. It ranks with all-time subterfuges as an emergency response to America's declining global status, just as its twin, anticommunism, was the springboard marking American ascent in the decades following World War Two. In each case, a makeover of US social structure, wealth distribution, domestic stimulation to obedience, becomes accelerated, with the militarization of capitalism the midwife unifying these phases of development.

Obama did not go to Paris because his crocodile tears for the slain French would have been immediately apparent. America thrives on counterterrorism; under Obama, it ensures the conditions for terroristic activity to continue, America's specialization of attacking Muslim countries, the black sites, renditions, regime changes, enhanced interrogation, all inseparable from the interventions, wars, and diplomatic support for dictatorial regimes (Ukraine, Israel, for starters), only exacerbating the geopolitical paradigm by which the US seeks to keep its position in the world. Too much is at stake to show one's hand. The US has perhaps never cherished secrecy so much as under Obama's watch, an ideological model for the terrorization of the American people while affording the requisite aloofness arguing presumptively for the country's unparalleled strength. The King of Counterterrorism need not, even dare not, come down to the level of his subjects—Cameron,



Hollande, Merkel, etc.—the magic of arrogance needed for bigger things: the confrontation with Putin and Li.

But the more compelling reason for avoiding Paris, crocodile tears aside, and the contemptuous attitude taken toward world leaders not measuring up to America's power, is, in the classic terms of US foreign-policy principles, No Entangling Alliances (other than those already negotiated in America's favor), which speaks to the unilateral free hand America seeks on the world stage. Counterterrorism must wear the US brand, open-ended in scope, conducive to domestic regimentation, almost as though a franchise on the brand, which makes America the custodian of global security and brings to fruition the dream of a clash of world civilizations, us and them, isolating the Muslim world and ensuring America's domination of the remainder. Let the French prattle on about freedom of thought and hold their demonstrations of a million, we know better, we know how to silence opposition, even if usually taking a soft-approach like compressing the political spectrum so narrowly as to destroy the idea of alternatives.

Best of all, the terrorist is the helpmate of American conformity, the means of unifying a people around the symbols and themes of patriotism—the quintessential Outsider cementing the cohesion of the in-group. France at the moment may be experiencing the same kind of ideological reinforcement, but the sheer numbers involved are frightening to the Disciples of Order. If Occupy Wall Street doesn't stand a chance, how expect the crowd in the Place de la Concorde to find acceptance in American officialdom? Obama as usual is going to toughen it out, against presumed enemy and friend alike. His lap dogs Biden and Kerry may make appearances, and he, in turn, lap dog to America's ruling groups, where financial, industrial, and military elites gather in ever more systemic fashion, can be expected, again, as usual, to deliver the goods—a perfect synthesis of oligarchic capitalism dressed in the garb of wholesomeness, liberalism, and above all peace.

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Obama is parlaying counterterrorism into a military-ideological vehicle for maintaining now-threatened American global hegemony. The world order is no longer US-centric, whole geographic and power blocs shifting around, seeking separation from America's influence through new alignments or initial autarkic experiments. The US's customary free hand in world affairs is becoming a sad memory, "friends" either bought off or resentful at the dependence so difficult to shake, or both, and "allies" forced to toe-the-line through participation in military interventions and diplomatic loyalties—equally grating to leaders' ears. In large, Europe and Latin America can no longer be taken for granted, as if to say, international free agents in-the-making, unwilling to accept the salary caps embedded in trade agreements, and tired of the extravagance of military spending when solutions to unemployment and social needs have to be met.

Counterterrorism—increasingly a self-created albatross around the neck primarily of the West. It may be too late to avoid the so-called Clash of Civilizations, because history cannot be undone if only with good intentions. Major political-structural transformations, yes, but that presently is almost as remote as turning back the clock, specifically, the interrelated trends since the early-19th century of the rise of colonialism/ mercantilism and capitalism. The West has a lot to make up for, even to the present day. Jihadists are not freedom fighters, no matter how you slice it. But even the Charlie Hebdo massacre (no other word is appropriate) cannot be explained without recourse to the Algerian war, and before that, Vietnam, both of which demonstrated French cruelty, the ugly face

of imperialism, and for Algeria, as part of a long line now of Muslim countries, unreserved destruction, whether throwing people out of airplanes (Algeria) or dismantling whole towns through saturation bombing (Iraq).

Violence may and now does take on a life of its own, as though nothing came before. But something did come before, a severity of oppression and repression inscribed into the history and psychology of the lands affected by Western domination, lands predominantly Arab and Muslim insofar as relevance to the present crisis is concerned. Crisis? The world is struggling to enter a new phase of existence and development, and whether we speak of traditions of hegemony hard to break or the simple matter of oil (itself not sufficient explanation for the Western presence in the Middle East), it remains true a seedbed of resistance and revolt has been created, an intensity sharpened by the dynamics of religion, which is in opposition the West as it conceives itself, its values, its presumed contribution to civilization.

Here Obama with his reflex counterterrorism becomes, because of American power, the Sentinel at the Gate, warding off all threats to Democracy, Freedom of Thought, Capitalism, a heady brew having long ago forfeited any claim to other than designated labels rationalizing first and foremost US supremacy, others invited into the Grand Circle on America's sufferance. The world house behind the gate is being remodeled, the grand circle is holding in fewer and fewer loyalists. He could not attend the Paris March because Americans can't stand ridicule. The familiar presidential context of war, hegemony, grandeur of nuclear display, is losing global appeal—hard to take when respect for the US, for decades grounded in an overwhelming power and wealth, is evaporating. America is not powerless, but the estimation in foreign eyes is the destructiveness it is capable of wreaking, and support to others (notably, Israel) for the same end (as in Gaza), rather than promotion of the international commonweal.

Apropos of the foregoing, what follows is my New York Times Comment, Jan. 14, to Daniel Bilefsky's article, "Charlie Hebdo's Defiant Muhammad Cover Fuels Debate on Free Speech," also Jan 14, which points to the swirling controversy (mostly one-sided) over free speech. I see proponents for its absolute expression both unconcerned about the social welfare and the hurt caused to the Muslim people, and unwillingness to examine the hollowness of their professions of liberty and freedom, in light of the atrocities the West has committed, against Muslims, but so many others, over time. Will a spirit of international brotherhood finally emerge after the brutal murders? That is the last thing US policy makers want. Keep terrorism alive. It's good for business. The Comment:

Free speech works by common consent in a society that is founded on reason and that values social justice. If the society's own value system rewards incendiary and/or puerile statements, I question the quality of its "freedom." Freedom requires responsibility. It works only to the degree the people are worthy of its benefits. Weimar was a free society, yet tolerating Naziism in its midst led to its overthrow. Current usage of "free speech" is based on extreme libertarian doctrine, itself where we're at in Europe and America, where an alternative strand of social philosophy has been neglected, discarded, even vilified: the RIGHTS OF THE COMMUNITY.

I submit, Charlie Hebdo went, knowingly went, too far: this was not gutsy, courageous exercise of free speech, but the desire to shock and hurt—flippancy, rock-bottom cynicism

about what human beings are entitled to, including their self-respect and profound convictions.

This is no way apologizes for the murders; they and their perpetrators must be CONDEMNED in the harshest terms and penalized accordingly. That they occurred testifies to the deeper malaise in Western Civilization, the indifference to human dignity, the alacrity in finding solutions to differences through war and intervention.

Individuals are responsible for their acts, here the murderers. But reason demands asking about an antecedent causation—the West’s invasion of Muslim countries and commission of unspeakable atrocities. Sadly, no one has clean hands.

JANUARY 19, 2015

### **Persecution, A Crusade Against Muslims**

It all began with Elaheh Farahani’s interview request, (January 11), for Fars News Agency in Iran, of which she is a cooperating journalist. Farahani submitted eight questions regarding the attack, French security before and after, and the effect of the attack on the life of Muslims in Europe—will they be under more pressure? My response of January 12 follows (published by Farahani in Farsi in Iran).

### **The Assault of the West, and especially the US, on Muslim Nations**

I am honored to be asked about my views, but I must decline because I am aware of my own ignorance—I have not followed French newspapers, for example, or the larger questions involving Muslim integration into Europe. Your questions are excellent, only some of which I could answer. Instead, allow me to make a general statement, which may or may not be of use to you.

First, yesterday’s march of unity in Paris was deeply moving, not only numbers, placards, political leaders in attendance, but the sense—if only this is true—that the underlying spirit is the quest for peace and religious tolerance. My own concern is very different: that the march symbolized an erupting fear and hatred that would punish the country’s Muslim population and therefore destroy the hope of reconciliation and understanding. I was not there. I do not know, but the patriotic tone, the idea of a “war,” the implicit concept that this moment marks the instant where a clash of civilizations is starting, all are signs that widespread persecution—and terrorist acts in response—is possible.

I wrote recently that freedom of speech (broadly defined to include writing, and specifically here, political satire) is not absolute. Charlie Hebdo pushed up against the limits that becomes incitement and provocation to violence. The little I’ve seen of its satire is at the very least in bad taste, self-admittedly, designed to flaunt “freedom” by causing anger and humiliation among its targets, an unnecessary desire to hurt. Perhaps that is permissible and falls under the scope of free speech, but I think not. It invites violence, retaliation, and finally, a cycle of confrontation. One can blame the terrorist, but what benefit TO SOCIETY is there in goading him on?

Where I also differ from mainstream opinion is in saying: yes, emphatically condemn the murders and their perpetrators—never acceptable acts in a civilized society. But don’t stop there. The

West, and especially the US, have been in assault mode on Muslim nations for at least three decades, and before that, much longer through the “normal” workings of colonialism. I speculate, and it is no more than that because unprovable by this point, what if the Western-US pattern of imperialism/colonialism not been followed? Would terrorism ever have been actuated? We see results, seldom causes. This does not excuse murder, barbarism, hatred. Yet at the same time, account must be taken of what has been going on at the foundations of the historical process. The huge popular rallies in Paris yesterday were a magnificent tribute to freedom of speech and thought, but where at the same time is the internal criticism of France itself, and by extension, the EU and US, for war, intervention, torture, fully implicating France and its contribution to NATO, and its earlier actions in Vietnam and Algeria? France, despite the fervent display on behalf of “freedom,” does not have clean hands. This does not justify the murderers and their crimes, but it does force us to question the context from which their radicalization has been born. The alternative is to say, as many now are, that intrinsic to the Muslim faith is violence, rapine, an intensity of hostility to all things different.

This was followed by my article in CounterPunch, “Obama and Paris: Discredited Leadership,” (January 16-18), which speculated on the reasons for and significance of Obama’s failure to appear at the March of Unity—or send other representatives. Finally, Farahani renewed the interview request, adding one to the original eight questions, of which I felt I could briefly answer three (see below), and instead I wrote extensively on my principal developing concern: the persecution of the Muslim people in the wake of Charlie Hebdo, a political-ideological process in any case already under way in Europe as a manifestation of rising proto-fascism. America’s campaign of counterterrorism feeds, complements, and ultimately strengthens this proclivity. After stating, “In response to your questions, Elaheh, I have pared them down from nine to three, the others, dealing with specific information in Paris, I do not feel qualified to answer,” I wrote the following.

### **The Muslim Today Is the Jew of 1939**

First, though, a general statement: I am Jewish. My background and experience teaches me that when any group, social class, religion is singled out for persecution, discrimination, hostile treatment of any kind, this sets a precedent for doing the same to other groups, classes, religions—a precedent that creates a dynamic of hate not easily contained or stopped. With persecution of one group, the whole society suffers, its moral character compromised and diminished. Either there is respect for everyone, or a social cancer eats away at the people as a whole, sowing mistrust and cruelty.

The Jews faced this situation in the 1930s, culminating in the 1939-45 period in the Nazi ovens and gas chambers—the Holocaust. My fear is that the Muslim people of the present-day are at the stage of the Jews in the 1930s. The potential is ripe for a massive assault on their lives, their dignity, their teachings, their religion. Perhaps we will not see death camps, but the Muslim people have already suffered through Western wars and interventions. The world must stop the slaughter before it begins. The world must say No to the West in its misguided fears, anger, hostility; for it’s only recapitulating the historical experience of Naziism, now with another designated group to be cowed into submission.

This view, that the Muslim today is the Jew of 1939, is my own, is never mentioned, and, hopefully, is an exaggeration. But I see so much pent-up hostility in the West—anything can

happen. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his essay, “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” said that the anti-Semite is afraid of everything but the Jew, and instead is afraid of whatever is human, of social change, of love. Just so, now. The West, in what is becoming a crusade against Muslims, is afraid, not of Muslims, but of its own “enemies” within, those who want a democratic society instead of power, who want equality instead of poverty, who want love, as respect for fellow human beings, not jealousy, domination, contempt for others—the possible melting of the framework and foundations of advanced capitalism, predicated on war, force, suspicion of differences. Strike out, accordingly, at a target because of one’s own failures as a society: Muslims as the 21st century scapegoats.

Yes, there have been, for several decades, acts of terrorism and movements dedicated to that end. But I believe this would never have occurred had not the West, through a history of colonialism which then merged with and developed into full-scale penetration, commercial, political, ideological, of capitalism, occurred, directed against predominantly Muslim countries, but also as part of a general paradigm of imperialism taking in far more than the Muslim world, as for example, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

I cannot and would not condone violence, as we see in jihadist suicide attacks, nor would I use the prior history of exploitation to rationalize their need. But I would demand that a total view of the situation, notably, the West’s causative behavior and activities, be considered, so that—before it is too late—both provocation and response cease, be undone, a world founded on mutual respect be restored, or, if never achieved before, now constructed. Imperialism, in its broadest sense (beyond mere economics), and terrorism are connected, joined at the hip, mutually sustaining. Both must be broken, the connection severed, if the world is to know peace and well-being.

I wish to thank Elaheh Farabani for encouraging me to make these extended statements. My answers to his questions follow.

I shall keep my answers brief:

1. How do you assess the recent act done by Charlie Hebdo to publish another caricature of Islam Holy Prophet? Deliberately provocative, knowingly precipitating further tension; irresponsible, in denial about the hurt created to Muslims; slight admixture of opportunism, not the money, but the fame, from five million circulation.
2. What were your first thoughts hearing about the Charlie Hebdo attacks? Initially, I sprang for the “free speech” argument and horrified at the deed; still horrified, this was unjustified murder; but I also began to question the “free speech” aspect, and began arguing that free speech is not absolute, that boundaries not of good taste, but of the rights of the community, and of a people not to be vilified, must take over.
3. In your perspective, what were the real reasons of such deadly attacks in Paris? The murderers were demented, their act should never have occurred, and cannot be excused, but in their own minds, specifically, French repression in Algeria had to have weighed on them, that and anger over the desecration/caricature of Muhammad together tipped the balance.

### **The Torah Injunction to Welcome the Stranger—Violated**

Then, to come up-to date, we find Bernard Avishai’s New York Times op-ed contribution, “Netanyahu Sells French Jews Short,” (January 16), which places in perspective an important strand

of anti-Muslim political opportunism fueling the present societal tensions. Writing from Jerusalem, Avishai presents a view no doubt not popular in Israel or, for that matter, among American Jewry. If the enemy has changed since the beginning of the 20th century, that of Herzl's "political Zionism" with democratic-socialist possibilities confronting a repressive Europe, today, with Netanyahu, "apparently, not much else has." Europe is again the enemy; in Avishai's words, "The Jewish response [by that light] must be to self-segregate: affirm, in principle, the liberal values of the West, but deny they ever worked well enough for diaspora Jews; insist that we fight for our freedoms from our own ground."

The message is clear: The French, and the whole EU, according to Netanyahu, must "'wake up' and fight to protect 'our common civilization.'" The theme implied here of the clash of civilizations is clearly alive and well, which, true to the psychodynamics of authoritarianism (ethnocentrism, in this case) results in categorizing all Muslim people as the same. Obviously, when combined with the exhortation to combat, of which he and most Israelis are not shy in stating and acting on, becomes a form of ethnic cleansing. And Avishai queries, would not French Jews "who justly feel themselves a part of French civil society and approach Jewish religious culture with emancipationist skepticism" feel themselves "lost—upon arrival and for years—in Israel's secular Hebrew culture and under its Orthodox religious hierarchy?" This last shows Israel's own contradiction—to which I would add a further one (or political strategy): the way the secular hides behind the religious when Israel proclaims itself The Jewish State—more ethnic cleansing.

Few Israeli leaders and commentators do other than condescend when asked the foregoing question. Avishai's example is telling (the lack of an authentic Left in Israel and widespread consensus on official policy): "Even Yair Lapid, the self-described 'centrist' former finance minister who leads the youthful, hip Yesh Atid party, told an audience in Beersheba on the eve of Paris's unity rally that the need to fight terrorism 'is now reaching the Europeans,' and that European Jewry 'must understand that there is just one place for Jews.'" Israel. Yet Avishai, again on contradictions, states: "When it comes to Europe, Mr. Netanyahu is a lion for Jewish rights, insisting on the strictures of a republican social contract. But at home, he is cavalier about them. If French Jews did migrate en masse, what would they find in Israel?"

The questions are like sledgehammer blows, reminding us that discriminations practiced help to account for Muslim weariness at the occupation and the larger context of repression (which extends well beyond Israel). What would French Jews find? He writes: "Strict civil equality that reduces the threat of political violence? Hardly. A separation of religion and state that mitigates zealotry?...A Muslim Arab population that the government has assimilated with social investment and laws promoting tolerance? No and no.... An end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories? Mr. Netanyahu dismisses the idea as implausible." What Israel has done, in contrast to the richness of a rival concept of Zionism, is to turn "anti-Semitism into an excuse for Jewish exceptionalism."

My New York Times Comment on the Avishai op-ed., same date, follows:

In my youth, Judaism was distinguished by two traits, its cosmopolitanism and sympathy for social justice, often as radicalism. That did not preclude degrees of observance, from secular to ultra-orthodox, a religion of variegated beliefs and experiences, different social classes, etc. To be Jewish was to recognize the sacredness of the human soul under God, whether as racial equality or respect for the dignity of the poor.

That has changed over the last six decades; even the alternative strands of Zionism have become one, with little opposition. Israel is now the Warrior State demanding the allegiance to and support of world Jewry. No thanks; my Jewish pride is reserved for the past. It does not identify with militarism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, all of which are embodied in present-day Israel and the basis for Netanyahu's urging of French Jews to emigrate to Israel.

If that happens, it means further reinforcement for more Gaza slaughters, more occupation, more totalitarianism that my generation of Jews fought against, suffered under, and triumphed over.

Israel becomes the magnet for the transmogrification of Judaism into the opposite of its cosmopolitan and radical roots—narrowly parochial and reactionary. Until and only if Israel changes, learns compassion, reconciles its policies with the Torah injunction to welcome the stranger and regard justice as holy, does it have a right to begin speaking for Jewry, and even then, respecting different paths to life.

JANUARY 21, 2015

### **MLK, American Subversive**

Hagiography, in this case the celebration of Dr. King's birthday, has its risks, the politicization of a life to suit the needs of later generations of admirers. Some half-century later, reflecting the evolution of the civil rights movement, his image has been sanitized, now beyond recognition (for those of us who fought alongside him in the 1960s), so that however chiseled in stone, if not to Mount Rushmore proportions, he has been rendered grander yet safer and more innocuous than ever. As the card-board poster of the present-day civil rights movement, itself having lost its purpose, its bite, its radicalism, he is caricatured, albeit perhaps unknowingly, by those who take his name to justify a mode of protest and social thought, as a single-issue (civil rights narrowly conceived) leader very much within the structure and tradition of American democracy. Those who applaud him and honor his life today would shudder at the realization of the SUBVERSIVE content of his actions and, above all, his vision. Even his most fervent admirers do not match him step for step today in the necessary enlargement of goals making the emancipation of humankind possible and practical. Instead, as the tributes roll in, rhetorical overstatement imitating his cadences but not his content, takes over, absent the critical/transcendent issue of social transformation.

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Dr. King did not conceive of civil rights in a vacuum. Perhaps as his thought matured, his convictions hardened, he had no choice, that's how deeply-entrenched segregation was, nationwide, in the 1950s. Lunch-counter desegregation, the right to register and vote, discrimination in education and housing, all were valid goals, singly and together, in marching out of the Dark Ages. But by the time of the March on Washington, late August, 1963, Dr. King and other leaders of the black community, especially those from an earlier generation, some of whom, like Robeson and Du Bois, recognized that single-factored protest, however important, would not avail. Society itself had to be transformed, if any of the changes was to be effective and have meaning. Ergo, while, say, lunch-counter desegregation (I early joined the picket line, along with Gabriel Kolko, on Saturday mornings in front of Woolworth's in Harvard Square) could be seen as imperative to the struggle

for racial equality, even more so Freedom Riders to desegregate interstate commerce, it did not take Dr. King long to realize, from his religious faith, that civil rights was a special case of HUMAN RIGHTS, the latter effectuated by a wider structural transformation.

Why? Because he saw the foundations of American society to be faulty, and by foundations, I mean, for Dr. King, capitalism and militarism as directly related to the degradation of blacks in America. This was neither borne in him since divinity school nor a sudden realization in the middle of the night. But he was not blind. Poverty was everywhere, war, while taking on global proportions likewise, following World War II, now focused clearly on Vietnam, a War Crime of collective proportions indicting the US as having compromised all democratic principles. The March on Washington was an historical watershed, a significant personal turning point for him. Out of that magnificently announced vision, “I have a dream,” two explicit directions, themselves later integrated into one, were articulated in still perhaps inchoate form: antipoverty, antiwar, the Poor People’s Campaign, opposition to the Vietnam War.

Dr. King could be indulged by presidents in hopes of re-absorbing him into the mainstream, but he was a marked man post-Washington March. Here philosophy and practice merge, and because of that an urge to discredit, to punish, to extirpate, coming from the White House and organized forces of repression; he had to be silenced. To approach emancipation from the perspective of humankind introduced a class analysis into his religious/worldly praxis: therefore the Poor People’s Campaign, meant to affect blacks and whites alike, both impoverished in the lower rungs of the social scale, a framework the product of none-other than capitalism. A democratization of the social system followed as night the day, having God’s sanction. Similarly, non-violence was not an exotic doctrine flowing from the Ganges (Thoreau could take it directly from the waters of Walden Pond), confined only to a personal code of living and of conduct. Non-violence had explicit anti-militaristic significance and connotations. Get out of Vietnam! Halt covert actions, stop supporting death squads, cease holding nuclear weapons over the world’s head as the ultimate means of intimidation. Dr. King was a dangerous man, a subversive best kept constantly under watch.

Subversive? He a church man, subversive? Because civil rights translated into successively enlarged human rights, fundamental social/structural/ideological change alone could adequately address American reality. Keep your eye on the prize(s), here, voter registration and the desegregation of public facilities, became an absolute flooring for pushing on—on to the end of poverty, the democratization of class structure, the categorical transformation of foreign policy, away from militarism, imperialism, war, and toward a pacific international system which would be founded on mutual trust and mutual respect. All of this he believed was necessary for the realization of freedom in daily life. There was, for Dr. King, no separation between theory and practice, practice becoming the living out of the theory, which is to say, the achievement of economic welfare was the fruition of moral philosophy. Nor could such welfare be achieved so long as America engaged in global posturing. The gospel message, the Dream itself in distilled form in his powerful imagination, was the simultaneous abolition of poverty and war, out of which a LIBERATED humankind would emerge in a society of equity and justice for all.

Listen closely. I was fortunate to be present. This is just the opening: “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all



of God's children." The word "Now" becomes the springboard of spiraling explosive meaning. The dynamic is being released; his more explicit anti-poverty/anti-war stand lies over the horizon yet, but the black emancipation to be achieved is already in the cards.

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Race, for Dr. King, had to be rooted in what I am terming "the totality of context," in which pursuing civil rights, in passage to becoming human rights, had meaning only when society's oppressive institutions and conditions had been dismantled, replaced by the democratization of the one, the equalitarianism of the other. Presently, I believe, the civil rights movement is no longer the progressive historical vehicle that Dr. King envisioned. Why? Because it has isolated itself from the Great Issues that go beyond its own limited vision, specifically, the discussion and criticism of foreign policy, intervention, torture, war preparation. It has become putty in Obama's hands, something Dr. King would never have permitted. For what the struggle over civil rights represents is the struggle over the nature of government itself, the co-partner and enabler of advanced capitalism, or the servant of the people; the means and mechanism for mounting wars of commercial penetration and global hegemony, or the guardian of human rights via among other thing an equitable distribution of wealth, preservation of civil liberties, and provider of full-employment policies and a vital social safety net; a government, antiwar and antipoverty in inspiration and at its very roots. Hence, a totality of context, consistent across the boards, where the gains of one are not at the expense of injury to another. America cannot act with impunity in the world, and expect a polity of justice at home—the scathing contradiction presently upon us (except that we neither see it nor have justice).

Civil rights, like anti-war, movements in America are a profound disappointment, their horizons now shrunk from that of their former selves—perhaps Dr. King's death, and none really to take his place, one small factor in accounting for this. Of course, societal pressures have been building to that end for decades, the wars themselves important in eliciting feelings of patriotism, the lack of transparency in government, enabling the CIA and the NSA to run stark naked undetected in their combined onslaught on American freedom, another factor. Here the itemization of factors is too numerous to mention, so close are we to the advent of fascism, so far away are we to offering effective resistance. For Dr. King, non-violence came to signify straight-out opposition to what in his time and now through the present is an international posture of world bully, itself always having detrimental effect on the social safety net, and hence the class system. For him, voting rights was not enough, non-violence (narrowly conceived), not enough, ah, anti-militarism, now we're getting somewhere, but there still has to be more. As my myriad stock-market reports (kidding, of course) say, this page is left intentionally blank. It is for our generation to work out the answers—and certainly not for me to dictate or even suggest a paradigm for going forward. But one can say, black emancipation requires the emancipation of all, a universality of humankind, a capacious world tent, in which the variegated scene of religions, political economies, cultures, however human beings create structures to enhance their dignity and well-being, be guided by tolerance for each other and a spirit of mutual respect.

JANUARY 23, 2015

## **Obama's Soft-Core Pornography**

In Edward Bond's play, "Early Morning," which I saw at the Royal Court Theater in London, in, I believe, the fall of 1969, or possibly the months following, Florence Nightingale steps out on a darkened stage and says to the effect of, "My God, I've been raped by Queen Victoria!" The English had a directness, at least in 1968-9 (when I returned home I discussed this with John Lahr who was championing Joe Orton) altogether lacking today, especially in America, whether in the theater or, my concern here, politics, to be exact, Barack Obama, whom, though I'm not a dramatist, I see, in my mind's eye, metaphorically, of course, raping the Statue of Liberty, a stand-in for raping the American people. Too harsh? Poor taste? Sure, but nonetheless imperative to be spoken—with this qualification. If we were translating rape into political-structural terms, this could be shorthand for fascism. Obama does not quite get that far—yet; so, for the sake of verisimilitude (even drama has its standards of historical accuracy), we must qualify this to say, from Statue of Liberty to American people, or whatever, not vaginal penetration (or its male equivalent—I am no authority!), but extensive foreplay, shorthand therefore for proto-fascism. Serious matters require that we not exaggerate: proto-fascism will do nicely, thank you.

Why "soft-core pornography" in characterizing the speech? Man and speech come together, even if he didn't write it. Cody Keenan did, whom NYT reporter Michael Schmidt considers adept at presenting "the struggles of ordinary Americans [here the idealized couple Ben and Rebekah, as we'll see] in... the gritty, Everyman prose that has become [his] trademark," in sum, a master propagandist (mine), who, along with the teleprompter, provides heft if not gravitas to Obama's rhetorical style. Thus, following my Webster's Ninth New Collegiate, admittedly out-of-date, I use pornography advisedly and literally to mean, traced back to Greek and French, harlot, and harlot from Old French to mean rogue or prostitute. (As we say, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Not here, though). As for soft-core, the difference between foreplay—six years of it, in setting up the American public for the lumpen qualities necessary to not only tolerate but actively support war, wealth concentration, the whole Obama-Democratic thing (Republicans already having stepped over the line)—and penetration, between proto- and fascism full out, suggests continuous stimulation as preparation for the final act, one to be determined. Stay tuned. Global hegemony or nuclear conflagration—take your pick.

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The State of the Union Address had all of the solemnity and dignity of a massive advertising campaign to sell toothpaste, life insurance, or Chevy trucks—next to none. I'm being charitable. Indeed, speaking of advertising, let's begin with the stars of the Address, Ben and Rebekah, who are introduced early, after some softening up. The nation experienced "two long and costly wars" and "a vicious recession." Yet "tonight, we turn the page.... America, for all that we've endured, for all the grit and hard work required to come back, for all the tasks that lie ahead, know this: The shadow of crisis has passed, and the State of the Union is strong." Amen, feel good (the necessary mood of the huckster): "we have risen from recession freer to write our own future than any other nation on Earth." Success is here, "an economy that generates rising incomes and chances for everyone who makes the effort."

Ben and Rebekah have the required “grit and hard work,” they will make “the effort,” a late 19th century refrain from Social Darwinism sunk deeply into the American mindset. For, if one does not advance up the ladder of success, this is presumptive evidence of not having made the effort. Ergo, those who do succeed are entitled to their wealth, the poor justifiably left or kept in their place. We, or at least I, feel manipulated from the get-go. Obama asks, will we be “fearful and reactive” in the world, “[o]r will we lead wisely, using all elements of our power to defeat new threats and protect our planet?” Upbeat in mood, but covering over the disconnection between writer, who paints the rosy picture of prosperity, and speaker, who executes the deadly policies of what I shall term, militarized capitalism (“using all elements of our power”). Then, our friends enter, a somewhat embarrassing re-run, on Keenan’s part, of the (in)famous Harry and Louise commercials sponsored by the Health Insurance Association of America in 1993 to head off health care legislation. (Harry and Louise commercials since then have been on all sides of issues depending on who was paying, but the propagandistic value of the personification of issues has been amply shown, including here.)

Best keep things vague. Obama: “So tonight, I want to focus less on a checklist of proposals, and focus more on the values at stake in the choices before us.” Ah, the cheerful kitchen, a young couple, miles away from drone assassination, intervention, covert activities, government support of banking, trade, and the business system. He begins: “Seven years ago, Rebekah and Ben Erler of Minneapolis were newlyweds. She waited tables. He worked construction. Their first child, Jack, was on the way. They were young and in love in America, and it doesn’t get much better than that.” No it doesn’t, not a commie or terrorist in sight! Real Americans! To criticize the scene, and by extension, whatever Obama says and does, and Government, Business, Capitalism, puts one in an unenviable position. True grit: “‘If only we had known,’ Rebekah wrote me last spring, ‘what was about to happen to the housing and construction market.’” The crisis deepened, “Ben’s business dried up, so he took what jobs he could find,” while Rebekah “took out student loans and enrolled in community college and retrained for a new job.”

Here Obama-Keenan could have said, Dagwood and Blondie, so doggedly do people—especially those in Congress—want to miniaturize monopoly capital to the corner grocery or small town business section, Ben and Rebekah, in the way used here, similarly, Harry and Louise, personifying corporate/banking moguls, at the breakfast table clearing their own dishes. We see in the device incipient fascism: hard work, middle class identity, innocence, good will, the FOLK conveniently standing astride a system equal parts militarism, advanced capitalism, hierarchical class structure—the key (Obama’s emphasis shortly on middle class economics) being the use of the middle class ad infinitum, denying class, wealth, power altogether. (Joseph Goebbels would be tickled.) The Ben-Rebekah narrative continues: “They sacrificed for each other, and slowly, it paid off. They bought their first home. They had a second son, Henry. Rebekah got a better job, and then a raise. Ben’s back in construction and home for dinner every night.”

Jaime Diamon meet Horatio Alger meet Barack Obama. Rebekah: “‘We are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, very hard times.’” Obama: “America, Rebekah and Ben’s story is our story. They represent the millions who’ve worked and scrimped and sacrificed and retooled.” No modesty here, Obama the selfless patriot (with this ideal cover pushing his own record spanning war crimes to derelict regulation of the major power centers of the economy conveniently aside) solemnly now avers, Ben, Rebekah, Jack, and Henry safely tucked in bed: “‘You are the reason that I ran for this office.’” Further, “You are the people I was thinking of six

years ago today in the darkest months of the crisis when I stood on the steps of this Capitol and promised we would rebuild our economy on a new foundation.” The rest is history: deregulation, mergers, consolidation, muscular trade agreements, an economy suited to capital accumulation, not to the deconcentration of wealth and power or equitable class arrangements. And of course, the non-economic sector has fared as poorly, beginning with the massive surveillance of the American people, and so on.

The remainder of the Address purports to be a litany of perfection, but on close inspection solidifies or continues the main lines of economic consolidation and wealth concentration. Obama: “We believed that sensible regulations could prevent another crisis, shield families from ruin, and encourage fair competition.” If he means by that the much vaunted tax on banking, let’s look closer. David Dayen’s article in the *Guardian*, “First thing we do, tax all the banks,” (Jan. 21), finds that “Obama’s middle-class economics plan makes good sense,” the provisions, however suggesting both minimal correctives and reasoning less to do with the public than with continuing the banks’ profits. In other words, government stabilization of the private sector on terms supportive of the latter. First, this is almost five years in which the Obama administration did nothing: “Obama’s tax plan is actually the first real plan for financial regulation from the White House since the passage of Dodd-Frank financial reform in 2010.” And what has Johnny-come-lately come up with?

Dayen reports: “One notable aspect of Obama’s plan is that financial institutions with assets of over \$50bn would have to pay a 0.007% fee, a kind of tax for being too big to fail.” Wow, sounds socialistic! A crushing burden, but even that slap-on-the-wrist proves illusive: “But the key to the plan is that it does not attack the bank’s assets, or what they own; it taxes their liabilities, or what they owe.” Whew, for a second I saw the Bolsheviks marching on Morgan Chase. Dayen explains, “it’s a tax on bank borrowing,” and that if Obama simply wanted to raise money—in the Address he viewed it as a way to finance other programs—he “would have proposed taxing the bank’s assets, which are hard to reduce.” But he didn’t. Likewise, the presumed attack on corporations, a centerpiece of Obama’s middle class economics, again, to the barricades: The corporate tax rate is currently 35%. Republicans want the new rate to be 25%, Obama, 28%. On such mole hills are mountains created. In Paris we hear, “Je suis Charlie,” what I’m hearing from Washington, “Je suis Charlatan.”

Back at the old stand: “Tonight, together, let’s do more to restore the link between hard work and growing opportunity for every American.” Here Keenan, to Obama’s approval (else, deletion), appears to have listened to Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt*, who couldn’t have said it better if he tried: “Like millions of hardworking Americans, Rebekah isn’t asking for a handout, but she is asking that we look for more ways to help families get ahead.” The term “handout” has been the cudgel to beat down the poor and working people in general at least since the time of Herbert Hoover, and ill comes out of the mouth of a Democratic president. No surprise there. Nor that he adopts the phrase “middle-class economics.” Too, Obama falls back on the reputation of the New Deal, riding its coat-tails without giving its content. His exhortation, “they needed to go as far as their efforts and their dreams will take them,” returns to the theme of hard work—if you don’t make it, you don’t deserve to. In fact, middle class economics is superimposed on a monopolistic structure of extreme wealth concentration. Every man an oligarch, if you can do it.

In such a framework, even were paid sick leave and paid child care achieved, both advocated here, class relations would not be altered. And, as in his remarks on infrastructure, this would be to

make America “the place where businesses want to locate and hire,” the capitalization of private requirements as the answer to outsourcing—aimed at China, as is his angry outburst: “China wants to write the rules for the world’s fastest-growing region [to the detriment of our export trade]. As always, he allows Wall Street to hide behind the presumed welfare of the American worker: “That would put our workers and our businesses at a disadvantage.” The worst thing America could do: “Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules. We should level the playing field. That’s why I’m asking both parties to give me trade promotion authority to protect American workers with strong new trade deals from Asia to Europe that aren’t just free but fair.” Global hegemony is an unquestioned assumption.

With trade supremacy, hegemony is happily mixed with military supremacy. He states: “Of course, if there’s one thing the new century has taught us, it’s that we cannot separate our work at home from challenges beyond our shores.” Flags flying, trumpets sounding, if only in his listeners’ and the nation’s imagination, Obama proudly declares: “My first duty as Commander-in-Chief is to defend the United States of America. In doing so, the question is not ... whether America leads in the world, but how.” Hegemony, not only an unquestioned assumption, but also a foregone conclusion. What more can be said of the Address, except that Obama uses the occasion to rev up further sentiment for confrontation with Russia.

After calling for Congressional authorization for “the use of force against ISIL,” he turns to Russia: “[We] are demonstrating the power of American strength and diplomacy. We’re upholding the principle that bigger nations can’t bully the small by opposing Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine’s democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies.” (This is getting to be too much, given Kiev’s infestation of Nazi-types.) And in full-view of the world he publicly disparages Putin in a State of the Union Address, quite unusual: “Last year, as we were doing the hard work of imposing sanctions along with our allies [somehow, “hard work” doesn’t apply, except to give sanctions an ethical quality], as we were reinforcing our presence with the frontline states, Mr. Putin’s aggression, it was suggested, was a masterful display of strategy and strength.” Obama seems always to be to comparing himself to Putin, to his own advantage: “Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated, with its economy in tatters. That’s how America leads: not with bluster, but with persistent, steady resolve.” There already seems enough bluster to go around.

Few commentators appeared mindful of foreign policy in the Address, but on position on Cuba and Iran reveals further hegemonic claims of righteousness and grandeur. On Cuba, he says that the US “shift in Cuba policy has the potential to end a legacy of mistrust in our hemisphere and removes the phony excuse for restrictions in Cuba, stands up for democratic values and extends the hand of friendship to the Cuban people.” Make a show of accommodation, so as not to lose US influence in Latin America; the democratic values in question refer to capitalism; most interesting, extending the hand of friendship to the Cuban people is the old Wilsonian point—appeal over the heads of the government to the people (a mainstay of American foreign policy, from food assistance to NGOs, to Radio Free this and that). Also, hiding behind suddenly popular Pope Francis—“diplomacy is the work of small steps”—Obama adds that “these small steps have added up to new hope for the future in Cuba.” (My own take: Cuba should have rejected US advances, as the sweet embrace of the boa constrictor.) His passage on Cuba reminds one of a predominant Cold War thesis applied to Eastern Europe: from slave to free, the Captive Nations theme.

Iran, similar. Negotiations, yes, but the fateful insertion that America reserves the right to do as it likes: “There’re no guarantees that negotiations will succeed, and I keep ALL OPTIONS on the table to prevent a nuclear Iran.” (my caps.) Then, “The American people expect us to only go to war as a last resort, and I intend to stay true to that wisdom.” Yet given the propaganda offensive, and the felt need seemingly at all times for an Enemy, last resorts at times become first resorts. There is also a part on cyber-attacks, “No foreign nation, no hacker, should be able to shut down our networks, steal our trade secrets, or invade the privacy of American families, especially our kids.” Mention of the kids aids in the power of deniability; America is engaged in the massive surveillance of its own people, invading the privacy of American families nicely the job of the US government. There is, of course, more to the Address, but I think the point is clear. Instead of a program and policy of democratization at home, and peace abroad, Obama’s State of the Union Address is a prime example of soft-core pornography: hard work, the crutch to hide wealth accumulation, American values to rationalize global exploitation and global intervention.

He states near the close: “And there’s one last pillar of our leadership, and that’s the example of our values.... We respect human dignity, even when we’re threatened.... We defend free speech.... We have a profound commitment to justice.... We cherish our civil liberties.” Each and every one of these claims can be disputed. And in a burst of joy, he declares: “That’s what makes us exceptional.”

JANUARY 26, 2015

### **Shill for American Capitalism**

After delivering a State of the Union Address that put Obama, with his Ben-and-Rebekah shtick which served to personify/miniaturize US advanced capitalism, as though Dagwood and Blondie sitting around the breakfast table, he set off to India, awaiting the open arms of Prime Minister Modi, as pitchman for the American nuclear power industry. Compare at the outset the double standard with reference to Iran. (It invariably depends on whose ox is gored.) We do for India what we not only refrain from doing for Iran, but positively try to crush Iran to realize the Israeli-Saudi geopolitical power play in the Middle East. India is okay—the military-civilian distinction in the use of nuclear materials pushed by Bush and Condi in their visit ten years before is alive and well for one, declared anathema as applied to the other. But why the delay in execution? India during that time and for decades previously had been seen as one of the principal counterweights to China in the region, Japan being the other. And hence, do whatever it takes to keep India happy—except in one salient area of concern.

The hang-up in potential deals was analogous to what we find in straight-out US imperialism: America’s insistence on what has been euphemistically termed status-of-forces agreements, usually signed, as was true of Iraq, under duress. In this case, whatever crimes committed by the US military (and one includes here as well, Blackwater “private contractors,” a.k.a., mercenaries) would not be subject to punishment in Iraqi courts. The equivalent here, in the advent of a nuclear catastrophe of whatever kind, American companies would not, in India, be liable for damages, civil or criminal. India resisted for ten years; under Modi it caved. No wonder the warm, developing friendship between the two countries; his embrace of Obama on the tarmac symbolically represents perhaps the sickest episode in India’s history since 1947. What would Gandhi, and even Nehru,

have to say about such an unholy alliance, India being sucked into America's plans to isolate, contain, and if possible dismember China—with Modi's counterpart, PM Abe recently freed from military restrictions in Japan's Constitution to press China from another direction.

Obama, as usual, does Bush one better, whether on successfully pushing American companies on India, or intensifying drone-warfare assassinations, or, relevant to both, shifting the US geostrategic posture from Europe to the Pacific, the pivot of military "assets" therein, accompanied by the Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership, complementing America's military moves. And India succumbs to his blandishments! I cannot speak for India's reasons, but manifestly it has signed up as America's ally in the New Cold War, perhaps in the perception that Russia cannot withstand American pressures and a new protector against China and to a lesser extent Pakistan is in order. Of course, Obama's "diplomatic" mission is disguised as the effort to secure a treaty on climate change, but (a) that's ludicrous given America's shabby record on the issue, and (b) climate change pales in significance, for US policy makers, compared with building the nuclear capacity of India (we'll see, unlike with Iran, how stringently monitored India will be in the use of materials for military purposes—something Bush earlier had accepted) as a chief deterrent of China.

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Traveling with Obama, Peter Baker and Ellen Barry report in The Times's article, "Obama Lands in India, With Aim of Building Stronger Ties," (Jan. 25): "Negotiators were working to clear the way for American companies to build nuclear power plants in India. Mr. Obama's predecessor, President George W. Bush, sealed a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with India, but it has been held up for years by a dispute over India's liability law. The Indian news media reported Sunday that the two sides had made progress toward a breakthrough that would be announced later in the day." Doubtless Obama would not have made the visit if issues of liability and criminality were not to be resolved in the companies' favor. And The Times itself appears jubilant:

"A breakthrough on the nuclear issue would provide both leaders a tangible achievement from the visit Mr. Bush reached agreement with India in 2006 to end a decades-long moratorium on sales of nuclear fuels and reactor components while India in exchange would separate civilian and military nuclear programs and open civilian facilities to international inspections."

Ergo, military facilities are accepted, legitimate, and because supplied with "nuclear fuels and reactor components," actively encouraged. Nuclear power politics has entered a new and still more dangerous stage. In the article, The Times explains why the delay over the years in reaching an agreement: "But the promise of a thriving nuclear trade between the powers never materialized because of an Indian law that would hold American energy companies liable for accidents. American companies sought more protection, while the Indian government argued that the American government should pressure the companies to invest anyway." Fat chance; that's not how imperialism operates. If this were not fraught with such danger, abstractly, further nuclear proliferation, concretely, a decisive move contributing to continued US global hegemony, the issue might be passed over as simply the way American presidents always act, pushing exports, foreign investment, and in happy coincidence with the two, as is true here, the furtherance of military and strategic objectives. Yet it is so typical, as witness Halliburton, Boeing, in fact the entire "defense" industry—business-government mutuality to the point of structural integration (a critical factor in the systemic emergence of fascism, ideological trappings depended on to follow)—that I see the

pattern, Obama carrying water for the same configuration of the military and intelligence communities on the one hand, mega-corporations favored by government on the other, as did those who came before him, as therefore confirming an ingrained policy-framework of war, intervention, and capitalist expansion. After India, whom else to buy off?

JANUARY 28, 2015

### **Ideological Trick du jour**

Why attempt now a theoretical discussion of capitalism, however skeletal and fragmentary, when so much else is going on in the world, America's militarization of culture and society reinforcement for its global posture of hegemony threatened as not before since World War II by the rise of other nations and their political economies in what is rapidly becoming a multipolar international system? The question almost answers itself. The US is running tight, perhaps even scared, not used to challenges to its unilateral overlordship of that system, backed by compliant "friends and allies" and the FORCE, actual and held in reserve, to implement its suzerainty. This week India and Saudi Arabia: fine-tune the Empire, negotiate and/or renew military alliances, offer guarantees of security-protection, a never-ending process of putting a finger in the hole to close the dike, the hole being peoples' aspirations for a life free from exploitation, one-sided trade agreements, an ever-hanging mushroom cloud darkening the future.

Why, again, now? Perhaps for the slightest of reasons, Obama's State of the Union Address, with its latest cliché of obfuscation: the so-called middle-class economics, to cover over a differentiation in wealth and power, and therefore a rigidifying of American class structure with increasing antidemocratic consequences. Income-distribution findings partially tell the story. Not the whole story, because power is geometrically enlarged the more established its foundations, and the more it is taken for granted by the (submissive, indoctrinated, habituated) populace. For power brings with it false consciousness, with IDEOLOGY coming to the fore in the stabilization and enhancement of capitalism, nowhere more so than in America with its fictitious claims of democracy, classlessness, guardian of world peace and the rule of law.

Hence, middle-class economics, a saran-wrapped monopoly capitalism made to look like an inclusive polity of opportunity in the making: We are all capitalists! We are all altruists! We are all equal—by virtue of all being Americans. The subterfuge is as old as the hills—Tocqueville bought into the myth, modern public relations/advertising firms subsisting on it ever since, as the Gospel of Wealth operates non-stop, corporate and banking executives, gluttonous in extremis, shoveling in the proceeds. Obama is perfect for our times, without scruples, the advanced agent of plutocracy. With his predecessors the chicanery was obvious, Clinton, the Democrat, matching Bush, the Republican, stride for stride in the arena of deregulation, overseas market penetration, and the economic stimulus of war preparation, which is solemnly pronounced "security" and "defense". However, Obama takes the cake, burying the process of wealth-accumulation in the platitudes of Americanism, the latest, middle-class economics.

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Herbert Marcuse in "Reason and Revolution," among the most significant works in 20th century political philosophy, stated in the Epilogue that capitalism's survival was predicated on absorbing



its negativity, a task, critical to its success, nevertheless beyond its means. Simply, capitalism is its contradictions, not as some abstract (to me) formula of dialectical materialism, but bread-and-butter, nitty-gritty structural and political modes of systemic behavior conducive to the formation and maintenance of a class-state in which working people by and large, in relative terms, approximate to Marx's reserve army of labor, via a condition of underconsumption to keep them in place and the principle of HIERARCHY firmly intact on an everyday basis. Contradictions as code, then, for the normalization of repression. But no, let's call this instead, middle-class economics. I've recently discussed the Address in these pages, the gimmick of Ben and Rebekah to personify and miniaturize advanced capitalism, Everyman and Everywoman sitting around the breakfast table making out the grocery list while Johnny goes off to school—a pastoral tale of Mega-Capitalism worthy, as I noted, of Goebbels.

But let's turn to income distribution, albeit, not Kuznets, or better, Gabriel Kolko's "Wealth and Power," to counterbalance Michael Harrington's social-democratic, namby-pamby "The Other America," and, rather, the New York Times article by Dionne Searcey and Robert Gebeloff, "In the U.S., the Middle Class Shrinks Further as More Fall Out Instead of Climbing Up," (Jan. 26), as an informal answer to Obama's middle-class economics. They begin: "The middle class that President Obama identified in his State of the Union speech last week as the foundation of the American economy has been shrinking for almost half a century." Not bad for The Times, thus far. But they too disappoint, using the elastic stretch on income range of \$35,000 to \$100,000 to define middle-class standing, in which in the late 1960s half of US households qualify. No-one (except those who fell out) noticed a shift occurring because more were "climbing the economic ladder into upper-income brackets."

Then Searcey-Gebeloff get serious (I say that because pre-2000 statistics show a different picture when income-levels are more precise, including the proportion in the bottom two-tenths of income share): "But since 2000, the middle-class share of households has continued to narrow, the main reason being that more people have fallen to the bottom. At the same time, fewer of those in this group fit the traditional image of a married couple with children at home, a gap increasingly filled by the elderly." And the writers admit, "Still, regardless of their income, most Americans identify as middle class. The term itself is so amorphous that politicians often cite the group in introducing proposals to engender wide appeal." (Perish the thought that Obama would stoop to propaganda—mine.) Even at that range in incomes, "many Americans making more than \$100,000 consider themselves middle class," especially "those living in expensive regions" like the Northeast and Pacific Coast. One feels for those at or above \$100,000—again, mine; the reporters observe: "However the lines are drawn, it is clear that millions are struggling to hang on to accouterments that most experts consider essential to a middle-class life."

Demographic changes in the composition of the "middle class" are instructive. "Even as the American middle class has shrunk," they write, "it has gone through a transformation." Seniors working after retirement falling within, couples with children falling below, the middle class as presently constituted. Thus, "In recent years, the fastest-growing component of the new middle class has been households headed by people 65 and older," their benefits providing a cushion as "older Americans are increasingly working past traditional retirement age." In contrast, "Married couples with children—who make up a category that is shrinking overall—are diminishing even faster as a share of the middle class." Married women in the labor force have kept this group from

falling further. “The most recent recession put a halt to the advances of even that generally successful group. Its share in the middle class has fallen by three percentage points and the share earning less than \$35,000 has increased.”

All is not well in Obama Candyland. My New York Times Comment on the Searcey-Gebeloff article, same date, follows:

So long as we speak of the “Middle Class,” whether statistically (the range \$35,000-100,000 is absurd) or as narrative, we will be fooled into thinking income-distribution is more democratic, and power distributed more equitably, than is actually true. Obama’s middle-class economics is a public relations stunt, a deliberate obfuscation of reality. Its comforting appeal is to look at America in non-class, non-structural terms, thereby hiding the concentration of wealth and shoving under the rug all that makes for INEQUALITY.

By using his frame of reference, which of course has predominated for decades, The Times contributes to the view that poverty and wealth can be analyzed and discussed in non-systemic terms. But what if inequality is inscribed in the foundations of US society? And how much, for good or ill, does massive defense spending, war, intervention, and militarism in general, have to do with economic-demographic breakdown?

We as a nation depend on militarism. The figures would be still worse absent these policies and expenditures. Yet no mention is made of the artificial prop to the economy. Obama’s State of the Union Address was a solemn farce in serious discussion of where we’re at? His proposed corporate tax rate is still lower than at present. His deregulation fostering financial consolidation is one of several engines of capital accumulation. Factor in inflation and a lot of people are struggling out there, as per bipartisan consensus on policy.

FEBRUARY 2, 2015

### **Netanyahu and Obama, Castor-Pollux of Modern War**

One need not go back to Greek mythology to see the obvious parallels. Both leaders share an identity as war criminals, Netanyahu, brazenly using the so-called War on Terrorism as pretext for extending Israeli power beyond the Middle East to international proportions, Obama, offering the same rationale as the means of stopping America’s decline whilst already at the pinnacle of global hegemony, complementary geopolitical paradigms of domination which are mutually reinforcing. Yet, step back, because I am not talking about two men, but two nations, themselves interlocked in ways which prescribe their mutual interests so as to draw them into a vortex of international politics placing each as obstructions to global democratic currents of, and aspirations for, change. America and Israel, here, collective twins, meeting at the interface of world counterrevolution in their headlong rush to uncontested, no-longer-challenged supremacy. Neither nation feels safe, otherwise, and, acting together, their respective nuclear arsenals discreetly showing, they believe—as their leaders make clear and have amply demonstrated through the commission of war crimes—war, intervention, torture, in execution of national policy, can be conducted with impunity.

Only, the world is changing, and license to commit atrocities is no longer freely extended, much to the dismay of both countries’ leadership. One reason we see the preponderance of deniability in

Israel and the US as to the course of permanent warfare each has followed, is the relative lack of criticism, dissent, and opposition in both, populations habituated to the presumed thrills and romance of VIOLENCE as a way of life, that, and layer-upon-layer of guilt piled on the respective national consciences to the point that the human life of the Other, whomever the designated Enemy of the moment or period, is held to be of no account. Human life is cheap and cheapened provided one is not in the in-group, a hardening of sentiment whether in bombing Gazan school yards or targeting, from thousands of miles away, armed drones for purposes of assassination. War crimes have been regularly committed, no recriminations, no punishment, at best slap-on-the-wrist investigations if even that, a poisonous psychological atmosphere in both countries which contributes to the mix of deniability and hubristic impunity.

How, then, even attempt to reach Netanyahu and Obama, moral basket-cases whose quarrels, while not feigned, disguise from themselves and each other, how much they are brothers-in-arms, metaphorical twins whose common purpose, transcending differences (of which I am suspicious) over Iran and the building of settlements (more units announced today at this writing), is the militarization of whatever is at hand, Zionism for one, advanced capitalism for the other. Even there it may be unfair to saddle either Zionism or advanced capitalism with the transmogrification each is undergoing, at their hands though a significant head-start had been made earlier. That is the point: Netanyahu and Obama are not new, for both Israel and America have been misshapen by their predecessors, or more accurately, the germinal concept of Zionism and capitalism, both, might have taken more equitable and pacific form under social-democratic influences: the kibbutz via labor Zionism, workers' democracy in America.

This, of course, did not happen, but neither did Netanyahu or Obama resist the tide moving toward the fascistization of society, in which militarism and capitalism become integral and indispensable. In each nation, the appellation "democracy" must be earned, and presently is nowhere near realization. Both leaders, notwithstanding cosmetic differences, have behind them a largely unified public determined to silence dissent, equally determined to close ranks around authoritarian principles of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, dichotomizing the world as either you're with us or against us, and if the latter, subject to unrelenting force, as befitting the psychopathology of fear of all that dares question official definitions of reality, for Israel, a divine right of occupation and rulership, for America, a divine right of, variously, privatization, market fundamentalism, unchecked commercial-financial penetration. Not coincidentally, both leaders, both nations, coalesce in working together to achieve their goals, custodians of a creed of exceptionalism which makes any self-defined goal permissible and morally-politically appropriate.

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In mythology, twins may have a wide variety of functions, take on different forms, even become altered to fit the interpretations and experiences of different political cultures and historical contexts. This is no time for Anthropology 101, but I've chosen Castor and Pollux briefly as stand-ins for our protagonists to suggest the brotherly attachment in barest form (their humane mission finds no counterpart in Obama and Netanyahu). Chiefly, because Pollux, son of Zeus, was immortal, and Castor, son of a human, was not—here it doesn't matter which is which, as between Netanyahu and Obama, it is the resultant that counts—what we find is that they had to divide their time between two places. For when Castor dies, Pollux gives up one-half of his immortality so that they can remain together. The two places are Mount Olympus and Hades or the Underworld, Castor

and Pollux spending half their time in each, which by my wild leap I shall define the former as WAR, the latter as CAPITALISM, themselves now historically joined together by, yes, Netanyahu and Obama, individuals, societies, militaristic ethos shaping political culture becoming indistinguishable.

Here is an account different from my own, Peter Baker and Jodi Rudoren's New York Times article, "A Strained Alliance: Obama-Netanyahu Rift Grew Over the Years," (Jan. 31), which on its face emphasizes personality conflict, rather than geopolitical and structural commonalities. Yet even these manage to peep through. During Obama's presidency the relationship has been off again, on again (the writers fail to mention that personalities notwithstanding, Israel receives \$3B in military aid annually from the US, the intelligence and military communities are thick as—well, friends, and the US has Israel's back at the UN, all among much else, so that, therefore, any supposed split at the top hardly changes long-term mutual relations). The immediate sources of the rift are apparent: Obama's pique at Netanyahu's plan, at the Republicans' invitation, to address both Houses of Congress in March without first informing him, and thought by the reporters more basic, "an American president eager for a historic rapprochement with Iran and an Israeli premier nursing an existential fear of a nuclear-armed enemy." This is doubtful, neither Obama nor Congress eager for rapprochement with Iran except as total surrender ("eager" is hinted at in NYT coverage of the same with Cuba, presumably as part of Obama's legacy, which is also nonsense, Cuba, like Iran, expected to make itself over as America specifies and would like).

Things are heating up. Obama is angered that Netanyahu supported Republicans in 2012, Netanyahu is angered that Obama "may be trying to influence the coming Israeli elections," and has disapproved of the current Israeli ambassador to Washington. (In retaliation, the aforementioned new settlements were announced.) Tit-for-tat: Israel did not support the US opening, such as it was, to Cuba; the State Department (Jan. 30) stated of the new settlements that this would "inflame already heightened tensions with the Palestinians and further isolate Israel internationally." Where commonalities come through can be seen in White House assurances such as that of Bernadette Meehan that relations between the two countries "was bigger than any single politician and diplomat." Meehan states: "It is an alliance that shouldn't be turned into a relationship between two political parties. Our relationship is about the strong bonds between the United States and Israel and our people, and our commitment to common interests and values." What those interests and values are, neither government nor its people is prepared to discuss out loud.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker-Rudorin article, same date, follows:

At the risk of condemnation from all quarters I shall say, of the Obama-Netanyahu feud, a plague on both your houses. Both are wrong. Both are war-mongers. Both have pursued policies in violation of international law and, in a morally upright world, would be charged as WAR CRIMINALS. Netanyahu on Gaza and settlements (for starters), Obama on drone assassinations and confrontation with Russia and China (for starters), deserve contempt and scorn for betraying civilization's ethics of humanity. And behind them, reflecting their policies, are two nations which by their respective hegemonic claims and aspirations, threaten world peace.

Deeply to be regretted, both nations are also nuclear powers and hardly to be trusted in not bullying their respective spheres of interest, for Israel, an increasingly large take on the

Middle East, for the US, the world itself. Here Iran is code for much else; neither Netanyahu nor Obama has a constructive posture—both are gunning for war.

Netanyahu is short-sighted. In America the bipartisan consensus on global Reaction and counterrevolution is obvious, mirroring Israel's own international policy. So, why fight? Kiss and make up, with AIPAC and Adelson, among others, bridesmaids at the new wedding. The rallying cry: Down with TERRORISM. Down with Muslims. Up with "democracy"—for both Israel and America boast of being the leading world democracies. Dissent is nonexistent in one, massive surveillance takes care of the other.

FEBRUARY 4, 2015

### **Price Tag for International Villainy**

Defense intellectuals, Pentagon officials (military and civilian), and the Obama administration are busy, the 2016 budget prepared and awaiting approval, implementing the continued elaboration of US unilateral world hegemony, as though this immodest goal were still possible in a changing global structure of multipolar power centers. Ambition feeds a voracious appetite for conquest. For the moment, Ukraine is at center stage, in reality, a dress rehearsal for taking on Russia, disgracing Putin, vastly expanding the geography of market fundamentalism, and even then, not satisfied, tipping the military-strategic balance against China, the real Enemy in Obama's wet-dreams. Who needs McCain and the literal revisiting of the Cold War at its most intense, when Obama and the Democratic party are equal to the task of permanent war, massive "defense" spending, and the obsession with hegemony?

The Cold War never ended, not even, for that matter, gone underground; rather, its permanence was set in stone through systemic pressures toward market expansion, ideological exceptionalism, and the militarization of advanced capitalism—a triad of American national-structural characteristics the US was loath to give up or even modify (assuming either was possible and still be—to use Obama's phrase, for other purposes—who we are). Penetration, ideology, militarism, all, when tightly integrated, bespeak strength interlaced, however, with fear—else why the constant emphasis on force, the muscularity of response (overkill), being ever vigilant? To the systemic/structural characteristics, then, must be added the psychological composite of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, in which fear of the stranger, the Other, the Enemy at the Gates (inherited from falling-domino theory) falls naturally into place with the erection of defensive walls to reinforce the all-important dichotomy of We and They in international politics (and its domestic counterpart, an ingrained permanent McCarthyism, most recently found in the campaign of mass surveillance).

Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are par for the course, and now Syria and continued pressure exerted on Iran, along with covert operations worldwide as somehow necessary testimony to America's power and greatness lest it be attacked or taken advantage of through displaying signs of presumed weakness. This need to show strength at every moment results in aggressive acts and long-term strategies not thought of in that light, but rather the peculiar mix of self-preservation and humanitarianism, wholly innocent of villainy. Democracy equals capitalism, freedom equals the acquisition of wealth, virtue equals success (as against those who remain behind, self-evidently their own fault), while militarism is the capstone to this lexicon of deceit, making all things

possible. Militarism is nobility of mind and purpose, that which expresses the genius of a God-fearing people for whom the world's treasures are laid open (primarily for the benefit of its financial-industrial-military upper groups).

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In modern times, to know a nation, look to its defense budget. Helene Cooper's New York Times article, "Obama's Defense Budget Aims Higher, and at Overseas Conflicts," (Feb. 2), outlines its provisions: "a base defense budget of \$534 billion in 2016," which explicitly rules out "mandatory across-the-board reductions known as sequestration." Ah, to be selective on where the funding goes (and break through the ceiling), such as \$51B for "operations in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria" and "the continued American military presence in Afghanistan." More than a half-trillion for starters, and still the administration's cry that the result "will be a military that continues to be capable of defeating any adversary but is too small for protracted foreign occupations." Questionable, in light of forces on the scene (or the euphemism "in country"). Whether or not the base defense budget includes the following, monies can always be found for worthwhile projects and defense contractors. Cooper writes: "But the budget also demonstrates a Defense Department that remains determined to invest in ambitious next-generation capabilities and big-ticket items, including ships, submarines, bombers and other aircraft. The Pentagon is also seeking funding for more F-35 fighter jets, built by Lockheed Martin Corp."

So much for an implied posture of relative disengagement (too small for protracted foreign operations). Ever-readiness on a global basis has its rewards—ISIS, Ukraine, Ebola, Defense officials hope, "will lead to a broad acceptance that the United States must continue to invest heavily in defense unless it is going to retreat globally." As the Pentagon said on the budget release: "The geopolitical events of the past year only reinforce the need to resource DoD at the president's requested funding level as opposed to current law. [Sequestration] would be irresponsible and dangerous, resulting in a force too small and ill equipped to respond TO THE FULL RANGE OF POTENTIAL THREATS TO THE NATION." (caps., mine) DoD, the tail wagging the dog, itself on a liberal leash, held by the Nobel Peace laureate.

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Budgets are all well and good, but let's look at what lies behind them, the immediate focus of attention being on Ukraine, this, I shall argue, merely code for a broader geopolitical strategy: confrontation with both Russia and China to restore America's global position as the unilateral superpower in shaping the world political-structural architecture on behalf of US monopoly capital and its ideological influence in preserving the ground rules of market fundamentalism, austerity, and the silencing of dissent. Ukraine, then, is small potatoes, except as the proxy battleground for global stabilization on counterrevolutionary lines. Within the last week, there has been a growing chorus, administration-orchestrated, echoed on cue by leading newspapers, NYT and the Washington Post, and a Report of defense intellectuals, former officials, notably, Kissinger, and military gurus, calling for "non-lethal" assistance to the Kiev government against a lustful Russia poised to take over all of Ukraine.

In this atmosphere, anything can happen. (Non-lethal is a term capable of infinite stretching.) First, we look at Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt's NYT article, "U.S. Considers Supplying Arms to Ukraine Forces, Officials Say," (Feb 2), an excellent source describing the drumbeat toward

escalation of some kind short of war vis-à-vis Russia. They report that Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO military commander, and “an array of administration and military officials” are calling for support of “Kiev’s beleaguered forces.” Because of “a series of striking reversals that Ukraine’s forces have suffered in recent weeks,” Obama is “taking a fresh look” at military assistance. The cast of characters is familiar: Kerry, to Kiev, for “new discussions about providing lethal assistance”; ditto, Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Rice, “now prepared to reconsider the issue.” Note, “lethal,” though non-lethal aid remains in the public-relations limelight.

The reasoning is tortuous: full military aid (the reporters call it “the provision of defensive weapons”) could “tempt” Putin “to raise the stakes”—so don’t go that way; yet nothing seems to help, leaving no alternative. “But the failure of economic sanctions,” they write, “to dissuade Russia from sending in heavy weapons and military personnel to eastern Ukraine is pushing the issue of defensive weapons back into discussion.” Then, the breath of fresh air for military outreach, the Report “by eight former senior American officials” receiving widespread Executive and Congressional attention, urging the US “to send \$3 billion in defensive arms and equipment to Ukraine, including anti-armor missiles,” etc. Other luminaries joining the report include Michele Flournoy, a leading choice for defense secretary if Hillary is elected.

The Report could not be clearer: “The West needs to bolster deterrence in Ukraine by raising the risks and costs to Russia of any renewed major offensive. That requires providing direct military assistance—in far larger amounts than provided to date and including lethal defensive arms.” Charging that Russia “has repeatedly violated” the Minsk agreement (last September) which called for a cease-fire in Ukraine, removal of foreign forces, and establishing “monitoring arrangement to ensure that the border between Ukraine and Russia would be respected,” US officials are silent as the tomb on Kievian bombardment of civilian centers in eastern Ukraine, or the proposed integration of Ukraine into the EU that would allow for NATO forces on the Russian border. One does not have to deny all Russian involvement in Ukraine to see that Putin’s position, hardly that of conquering the country, is for a federal system that would call for language rights and economic safeguards in the eastern provinces. Yet on all issues Kiev has proven to be adamant, encouraged by the US and EU, on non-negotiation either with the provinces or Russia, as meanwhile neo-Nazis are still prominent in the Ukrainian government and integration with NATO forces a desired goal.

My New York Times Comment on the Gordon-Schmitt article, same date, follows:

The report to be issued today has a roster of Cold Warriors and corresponding recommendations worthy of the 1950s. The US unmistakably seeks confrontation with Russia (and beyond, China) to maintain what in fact it has already lost in, now, a multipolar world structure: unilateral global hegemony.

Use of the term “defensive” is laughably hypocritical. Why not be frank: arm the Kiev government to the teeth, place large NATO forces on the Russian border, tighten still further the sanctions regime on Russia—all of which is occurring or soon will. Disregard the neo-Nazi leadership base of Ukraine.

Disregard prior US intervention in facilitating the coup. Disregard the West’s (led by the US) attempt to isolate, contain, and ultimately dismember Russia. For what? Market fundamentalism, IMF-World Bank austerity measures? Militarization of world capitalism

(again, US-led) is moving on the slippery slope of nuclear war as if Thanatos were in the saddle.

However, The Times, in an editorial, “Mr. Putin Resumes His War in Ukraine,” (Feb. 2), further wades into the discussion, both sharply punitive about military aid, yet conciliatory in recognizing the need for a federal solution there. Citing a Russian economy “staggering under the twinned onslaught of low oil prices and sanctions,” it suggested that this was driving Putin to sharply increase Russia’s support “for the rebels” in eastern Ukraine, a situation, because of “the eruption of fighting in recent weeks,” that requires giving “Ukraine the means to resist Mr. Putin—in money and arms.” For The Times, “Certainly the United States and Europe should increase their aid to Ukraine and explore ways to expand existing sanctions against Russia,” Breedlove and Kerry in support. Yet because “sanctions and diplomacy” have not stopped “Russian aggression,” the US and its allies must “take a new look at what would bring Russia to a serious negotiation.” And here it concedes that Putin “has no interest in annexing eastern Ukraine” [something the Report does not concede], and rather “seeks a Ukrainian federation in which the pro-Russian provinces would have relative autonomy, along with assurances that Ukraine will not move to join NATO.”

This, The Times believed has definite “potential for negotiations,” and went on to say: “Tempting as it is to focus on punishing Mr. Putin, the greater objective must be to end the fighting so that Ukraine can finally undertake the arduous task of reforming [market fundamentalism?] and reviving its economy. Toward that end, the West must make clear to Mr. Putin that if a federation is his goal, the United States and its allies will actively use their good offices with Kiev to seek a workable arrangement.” If, finally, we see a more constructive attitude, it is already falling on deaf ears at the White House and in Congress.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

Thataway NYT, let’s expand existing sanctions against Russia. The Kievian government is simon-pure; Putin is a psychopathic dictator. Who’s kidding whom here? You speak of casualties, yet imprecise to a journalistic fault. Let’s have a clearer breakdown. But more, do you think Kiev would even discuss an arrangement of true federalism with respect to the eastern provinces?

Your course is one of war. USG has been maneuvering into that situation for some time. Have you forgotten the COUP, or do you deny its existence? Have you forgotten Victoria Nuland and her plans/activities, or do you deny that too? Is Russia wrong in its concern that NATO seeks troops at its borders?

Demonizing Putin is surely great fun, or has it become an addiction (in the same way The Times for decades was obsessed with Fidel)? Before jumping into the fire that is Ukraine, ask yourself: Are the sanctions against Russia warranted? What of the neo-Nazis who were and are prominent in Kiev? Is confronting Russia part of a broader geopolitical strategy that also includes confronting China? And why, confrontation in the first place?

Unilateral US superpower-dom, in a changing world, is no longer possible. To then seek to enforce it, at the risk of global nuclear war, is irresponsible if not also suicidal. Start peeling away the layers of policy, including the war on terror, and see what is before our noses: an alarming re-activation of a Cold War that indeed never fully subsided.



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The Washington Post chimed in with its own editorial, “Raise the stakes for Russia to deter its aggression in Ukraine,” (Feb. 2), which treats Putin as impervious to negotiations (in any case, what’s to negotiate, in the Post’s view?), even though “well after the recent crash of the ruble and predictions by his ministers of a sharp and painful recession.” Hence, the bugle sounds: “Economic measures are still worth adopting, as they may influence Russian behavior or weaken the Putin regime in the longer term.” (Regime change here peeps out undisguised.) But for now, it continues, the US and EU allies “must consider how to stop the ongoing military aggression in Ukraine and deter Mr. Putin from further adventures [implicitly, all of Ukraine in his cross-hairs]. The clear answer is **DIRECT MILITARY SUPPORT** to the Ukrainian army.” (my caps.) Then the much-vaunted Report, Strobe Talbott of Brookings mentioned for good measure, plus added detail: \$1B immediately for military assistance, \$2B to follow over the next two years, with the hope that, the example set, “military aid from European NATO members such as Britain and Poland” would be forthcoming.

The West means business (in both senses, with financial-commercial penetration defining a security zone of capitalist enterprise that would be sure to follow): “No one, including Ukraine’s democratic government [?!] believes Ukraine can win a war against Russia. But defensive weapons could blunt Mr. Putin’s offensive and raise its cost in a way that might deter him.” And NATO has Ukraine’s back; in essence, a perceived weakness would invite aggression even beyond Ukraine. The Report minces no words: “If the United States and NATO do not adequately support Ukraine, Moscow may well conclude that the kinds of tactics it has employed over the past year can be applied elsewhere [the reference is to NATO members Latvia and Estonia].”

Finally, the Post’s Walter Pincus, an authoritative voice on defense policy (i.e., close to the actors and the action), has a penetrating article, “Seeking a strategy-driven defense budget for challenges facing U.S.,” (Feb. 2), which brings several other expected faces into the discussion. (Washington seems infested with war mongers, as though a condition of acceptance and sanity.) McCain, now chairman of Senate Armed Services, is a veritable tiger, calling for strategy-driven, as opposed to reactive (which he charges Obama with holding) policies, in order to envision and implement longer-term hegemonic goals. On Jan. 21, he said—simple, direct, war-provoking: “We must have a strategy based on a clear-eyed assessment of the threats we face and a budget that provides the resources necessary to confront them.” I interpret that as an universal state of conflict, and McCain right away called hearings titled “Global Challenges and U.S. National Security Strategy,” in which a blue-ribbon panel of Cold Warriors appeared: Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security advisers; Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, and Madeleine Albright, former secretaries of state; and assorted admirals and generals.

No one could agree on an overall strategy, itself disguising dire consequences of carrying the logic of defense policy to its conclusion, and simultaneously implying both universal threats and a permanent-war doctrine. (This is also standard White House wisdom.) Complexity is the theme of the day, melding with obfuscation to offer myriad opportunities for intervention and regime change—a gung-ho, hair-trigger set of mental traits ideally suited to what has become the expansive nature of militarism in America, which in turn fortifies the militarization of capitalism as the vehicle for conducting and rationalizing expansion.

Pincus writes, “All recognized that today’s threats—although far less dangerous than the Cold War’s potential nuclear exchanges—are more complex.” Somehow putting nuclear annihilation aside (itself an unwarranted assumption) thereby makes all seemingly lesser risks acceptable. Today, power politics short of nuclear war appears to Cold Warriors as transcending earlier times—perhaps therefore the license for intervention, regime change, drone assassination. Kissinger: “The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War.” Henry can always be relied upon to sound the tocsin. A totalization of readiness and war-making would seem to follow. Economic and military power is not enough, “any new strategy,” he states, must “include also psychological contests and asymmetric wars.” The reason for this, Pincus helps us to understand, is “because the existing order of nation states is being challenged, as well as the relationships between regions.” Strategy-driven, not reactive, which cannot go far enough or see all the dangers ahead.

Indeed, the more complex the international setting, the more innovative and daring the strategy and the weaponry to support it. Pincus gives the last word to Robert Work, Deputy Defense Secretary, who was speaking, while McCain conducted his hearings, before the Center for a New American Security, the cherry on the whipped cream complementing the other’s grand show of single-voiced bipartisan support for what has become the National Security State. He announced: “We don’t face a single monolithic or implacable adversary as we did in the Cold War. We face multiple potential competitors, from small regional states like North Korea and Iran, to large advanced states like Russia and China, to non-state adversaries and actors [e.g., ISIS] with advanced capabilities. Each of these are [sic] probably going to require a different approach.” And a different strategy—hence, one size doesn’t fit all, making it necessary to empower the military to act on all contingencies and, consequently, assign it a greater role in national policy and the requisite funding. (Mine, not Pincus)

Thus, Work observes, “we’re not going to be able to pick out one specific strategy that will be good for all potential adversaries and all potential capabilities. It has to be much more innovative and agile.” When one hears words like “innovative” and “agile,” especially in the context of a pervasive terror, adversaries lurking everywhere, wanting to do us harm, time to run for cover. Deputy Secretary Work does not let us down, presenting a wish-list (actually not, for already available and to hand) that would do Strangelove and Herman Kahn proud (even Obama and McCain); for as Pincus summarizes, the response “requires investment in nuclear weapons, space-control capabilities, sensors, communications, cybertechnology, munitions and missile defense. He also referred to technology investments in unmanned undersea vehicles, high-speed strike weapons and aeronautics.” To which Pincus quaintly adds, “This is why there is an increase in the defense budget, from high-tech to low-tech and everything in between.”

FEBRUARY 12, 2015

### **Saudi’s Privileged Status in US Foreign Policy**

For thirteen years through legal cases attempting to show Saudi financial support of al Qaeda, and thus bearing at least some responsibility for 9/11, the US court system, the Executive, and in fact the whole apparatus of the government, have played hard-ball, resisting evidence even though the issue directly affects the causation of a seminal event in the attack on America. No, 9/11 was not

Pearl Harbor, but it has become its major symbolic equivalent in more recent times,, justifying two military interventions, a global war on terrorism (selectively defined to fit US geopolitical interests), and the last-resort effort of America to maintain its exclusive hegemony in a world-power configuration composed of multiple rising power centers. If the war on terrorism isn't a sham, it comes close to describing American foreign policy in transition from anticommunism to Islam-phobia, the two interconnected by the US need to conjure up enemies, foreign and domestic, vital to engendering a permanent-war mindset (aka psychosis).

What makes the effort opportunistic is the way prior concerns take precedence: Saudi Arabia is sacred in American policy circles—not to be up-ended through aid to bin Laden in knowledge of his activities. Whether OIL is of primary concern, the Kingdom is looked to as a stabilizing regional force and influence. The latest example is having Saudi oil flood the global market so as to lower prices in order to cripple the oil revenues of Russia, a step in Obama's confrontation paradigm of containing Russia's influence while preventing (actually this driving them closer together) a Sino-Russian compact of mutual interests.

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When Zacarias Moussaoui's accusations that Saudi princes supported al Qaeda was categorically denied by the Kingdom's officials (as expected), this opened the way for the renewal of legal cases on behalf of the 9/11 families suing the Saudi government, cases deeply embarrassing to the US because realpolitik, especially where a reinvigorated Cold War under Obama is concerned, requires that national priorities trump local concerns, however patriotic in character. How important the Twin Towers, as compared to a global strategy of counterrevolution in which the Saudis have demonstrated maneuverability when it comes to neutralizing the Arab Spring, guarding Israel's back, and blocking the expansion of Russia and China in the region. Moussaoui's "tell all" need not be accepted at face value (his meetings with the members of the royal family), but Obama's adamant refusal to disclose the contents of Moussaoui's evidence, coupled with the standard Saudi legal motion for dismissal when his testimony came too close for comfort, surely argues for an impartial hearing, not the curt dismissal of official Washington.

I'd hate to be Obama should it be possible to weigh Moussaoui's testimony as over against Obama's technique of suppressing evidence via the use of redactions or stonewalling. One of the advantages of transparency is that it would do away with both. Instead, Obama sweeps everything under the rug and elevates the state-secrets doctrine to cover over his, his administration, and that of his predecessor's possible war crimes (not adjudicated before the International Criminal Court because of the US-applied pressures to shape its agenda). Sound familiar? What the US can do to the parameters of the ICC here is analogous to what it can do to that at the UN Security Council, e.g., on Palestinian statehood, and as a further test of American commitment to the rule of law and government transparency (an interrelated whole) its ready employment of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers.—a civil-liberties record that makes Obama's role on possible revelations of Saudi complicity in 9/11 unsurprising.

His fetishism of obfuscation has been integral to the formation of the National Security State. There is a sufficiency of suspicion, now with Moussaoui's allegations to re-evaluate Saudi involvement, to warrant Obama's taking a hands-off position, and instead he prejudices the Kingdom's innocence to ensure that it receive favored treatment. Consider if we were speaking of

North Korea, Iran, or Venezuela, and how forthcoming in its rush to judgment of innocence America would be in a similar situation to 9/11. Why the motion for dismissal as a symbolic response at the highest levels of government? Counterterrorism (a cause to which the Saudis have avidly enlisted) renews—or seeks to—America's global leadership role.

It gives promise of continuing the Cold War under another name, China and Russia still the prime targets now assuming the guise of only bigger jihadists. The issues, and presumed threats, are separable, yet in practice they have been fused to heighten the fears directed to both. A connective link can be found in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where Russia and China have presumably lurked in the shadows. The Cold War is alive and well, 9/11 merely the catapult in going after jihadists (the aforementioned wars) and continuing earlier practices: worldwide bases, strengthening NATO, promoting regime change as a generic principle, equally applied to Syria as to Russia and China. Opportunism knows no bounds when hegemony is involved.

But that is only a partial picture of America's ongoing policy framework. There is also China, and with the vast expansion of Cold-War possibilities, still, as before, seeking out areas/nations/regions which might—in fact, do—threaten US global hegemony, counterterrorism is even more serviceable for the creation of tensions justifying huge military expenditures (in the face of a declining if not decaying social safety net at home) and keeping foremost a political culture of angst to be relieved through renewal of further confrontation—hence (and I use the term not to be flippant but to point out the logic of the US position), Obama's Pacific-first strategy, including a major shift of military resources to the Pacific region to precisely the same end hitherto reserved for Russia: isolation, containment, dismemberment.

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On the global chessboard, one stands by one's friends. To admit Saudi involvement, even if it were (which it is not) ten degrees of separation in the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, violates the hallowed belief in the falling-domino theory, equally applied to one's allies as well as adversaries. In the present climate, to abandon Saudi Arabia would raise storm signals about who is next? Lithuania, Greece, Yugoslavia? No, the Fortress must not be breached—the Saudis can do no wrong. And if one followed the logic of this endorsement, the wider opportunism would become apparent, to wit: Empire threatened needs a scapegoat. US policy makers employ counterterrorism in the service of a now-wider Cold War (Russia and China as interrelated threats) through normalizing a state of siege to legitimate long-term geostrategic goals.

If terrorism is not to be discounted, still the US backed the very forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s that would become al Qaeda. Why? To counter in true Cold-War fashion a government in Kabul sympathetic to Russia, an example of attempted regime change which set the stage for the Taliban, thus furnishing the target for permanent US involvement in the region, now having the advantage of simultaneously confronting both Russia and China, from the back door. But US policy makers, if hardly gifted, are not stupid. Defense intellectuals pride themselves on a multidimensional take on strategic planning. For this was a golden opportunity to cement still tighter relations with Saudi Arabia for purposes of stabilizing the international oil market along with indispensable military alliances being perhaps foremost among them. Thus, the clear possibility of a cover-up of 9/11 by the Bush-Obama administrations: direct Saudi support for bin Laden throughout the run-up to the attack on the Twin Towers. Thus too, we now have Part IV of the

congressional intelligence committees' investigation of 9/11 still not made public after 13 years! Part IV, "Finding, Discussion and Narrative Regarding Certain National Security Matters," the 28-page dark hole which, divulged, might significantly question the rationales used to justify years of war, drone assassination, growing militarism, and stand as an indictment of government policies to shore up a declining American hegemony. Power corrupts; redaction only makes it worse.

FEBRUARY 16, 2015

### **Ukraine, Proxy Context for World War III**

Will the Minsk Agreement hold? Probably not. The West, the US in particular, has too much at stake in desiring its failure, and if Obama-Nuland style gamesmanship/adventurism is up to the mark, expect not-so-subtle sabotage and the resumption of hostilities. This is madness like not before. Neither Kennan nor Kissinger would have gone this far—the object? The weakening and ultimate dismemberment of Russia, bringing it under US-EU-IMF-NATO (the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse) dominance, vastly stretching the area of market fundamentalism.

Even though Russia and China have adopted definite capitalistic features in their political economies and as reflected in their power structures (the presence of Oligarchs and mixed enterprises enjoying State protection, which would have driven Rosa Luxemburg and any self-respecting Socialist mad), that isn't good enough for the Neo-Cons of the West, by which I mean the unified voice of both major parties in the US and Cameron and Hollande, with Merkel seemingly more bent on AUSTERITY per se than free-market political-economic tyranny. Capitalism here reveals its inner propulsion toward Nazification, not the gas chamber but its social analogues: class-stratification like not before in the modern world; homogeneity of outlook, geared to acceptance of elite controls over fundamental decisions affecting life-chances, Nature, human relationships; a state of permanent war matched with that of permanent impoverishment of the selected victims.

America is proudly leading the way. Income distribution has produced polar extremes, the increasingly enlarged bottom strata, in America, but also the global outcome, mired in debt, unemployment, fearful of the future. Societal tensions, polar extremes of another kind: authoritarian ethnocentrism, whether by class, race, ethnicity, a We-They distinction holding in all cases, and projected onto the world at large in the form of counter-terrorism. Political conflation, where the ethnocentrism applies to the few radicals who remain in our midst, as American society as a whole draws closer together, in spite of, or because of, its divisions, a solidification of fear and mistrust cementing the whole—the bipartisan sameness, especially on foreign policy—under the subterranean historical standard, anticommunism or antiradicalism.

Capitalism in America has done its work well, inducing a social paralysis among the people which allows banks to prosper as never before, military spending—and what it buys in the way of war, intervention, torture, as well as subsidization of an entire industry devoted to death and aggression—to break all bounds, a fragmented domestic polity where hatreds and assorted phobias are backed up by guns now firmly taking root. In other words, America is at the tipping point, cheering on recklessness in foreign affairs as in cheering on the pageantry of brutality in much of professional sports. Rah, rah. Beat those Russians, those Chinese, anyone who questions American greatness, America's right to rule the roost.

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Hence, L'affaire Ukraine, America's right to dispose of as it sees fit, a test case of its POWER on the world scene. But that only scratches the surface. Ukraine means more. In the American cosmology of rectitude, Ukraine is the doormat that must be crossed in order to facilitate confrontation with Russia, a direct face-to-face encounter from which it would be difficult, for either side, to back away. The walls are closing in, the West defining the surrounding landscape, the US the prime mover of the total armada pushing eastward. And few in America seem to mind. Western Europe, only slightly more. Ironically, in 1917 the response to the Bolshevik Revolution was not as great, not as determined, as in 2015, against a non-Bolshevik Russia. It appears that market fundamentalism is the legacy of anticommunism, or else the latter has become the substructure of its ideology and mental-set. Indeed, capitalism itself has been transmogrified, from a progressive social force in the breakdown of feudalism to a feudalistic militarism in the service of all counterrevolution and the prevention of change into socialism—or even capitalism that still seeks a progressive role to play, one with a significant admixture of socialism.

American leaders, political and business, realize the grand opportunity Ukraine affords to roll back any and all political-social formations that fail to correspond not only to a specific historical-structural formation of capitalism tailored to and complementing its [US] values and needs, but also fails thereby to ensure geopolitical/geostrategic principles of Western global dominance. Today, a.m. Russia, p.m. China, and tomorrow...the world!

My New York Times Comment on Andrew Kramer and Michael Gordon's article, "U.S. Faults Russia as Combat Spikes in East Ukraine," (Feb. 14), same date, follows:

It is clear, as NYT posters exemplify, that Ukraine is a black-and-white issue, the West 100% right, Russia 100% wrong, no qualms in rendering the judgment, no reservations, just absolute certainty in the West's moral rightness. The Times contributes to that moral absolutism, demonizing Putin in the process.

To say otherwise makes one a Stalinist or moral criminal. I guess I should wear a striped suit with a picture of Uncle Joe on a t-shirt. Ukraine is a potential seedbed for WWII and nuclear conflagration. Why? Because it is the proxy context for NATO's clustering on the Russian border, and because it is part of the US geopolitical strategy for promoting Russia's decline (similarly, Obama's Pacific-first strategy for China's decline).

Why deny the obvious? The US seeks the RESTORATION of its unilateral global supremacy. This is no longer possible in a changing world power-structure, not only the two major designated enemies, but other rising powers leading to a multi-polar global framework. The fact that the US has joined with (perhaps pressured) the EU to adopt a hostile stand—neither Nuland nor the COUP is a figment of my imagination, nor for that matter, neo-Nazis presence in the Kiev government—toward Russia, doesn't seem to matter in the West.

Deniability is the handmaid of the geostrategic posture. So be it. I alone can make no difference. Let the historical wheels grind on to the inevitable debacle—and worse.

FEBRUARY 17, 2015

## **Israel's Decimation of Gaza**

Operation Protective Edge is the killing machine of the 2010s, to Israel's everlasting shame. That is not how Israel perceives it, nor, increasingly, world, and especially American, Jewry. I write as a proud Jew, seeking to rid Judaism of the incubus of a hubristic-militaristic Israel that needn't have taken the form it did, as emulator of Nazi-style practices against a resident population on land which could have been the refuge of both. The nakba was inexcusable, degrading, cruel, immoral, the very antithesis of what Torah proclaims about care for the oppressed and love of the stranger. Israelis, by their actions, have forfeited their claim even to be considered Jewish, so vile their treatment of those they have already reduced to a parlous state. Gaza today is Dresden, rubble as far as the eye can see; only Hiroshima and Nagasaki look worse. Children playing amid ruins, families in tents and caravans, building materials intercepted by sea and turned back, infrastructure, UN schools, hospitals demolished—an Israeli society, passive onlookers, casual, uninterested, deaf to the cries of suffering and privation. Judaism mocked at the highest levels.

My dad, yes, from Pinsk, coming to America after World War One, who worked hard all his life, gave whatever he could in support of Jewish causes, a founding member of Rodeph Shalom in Bridgeport before moving to Miami Beach, used to say that bad news came in threes. Sure enough, in recent days, as I perused today's papers. First, the resignation of William Schabas who chaired the UN Human Rights Council's investigation into possible Israeli war crimes in this past summer's Gaza campaign. Faced with Israel's opposition to ANY investigation from day one (even preceded by Israeli attempts to "starve the beast," lobbying member nations of the International Criminal Court not to contribute to its operations), Schabas had no other choice. Vilified, accused of anti-Israel sentiments and activities (a distinguished international human-rights lawyer and scholar, who, among his many clients, once advised the Palestine Liberation Organization, fee—\$1,300), subject to death threats and a barrage of hostile emails, obviously organized, he believed that the commission findings, due next month, should not be lost sight of in this effort at intimidation and obfuscation.

I use the phrase "Nazi-style" advisedly and provocatively, to call attention to the techniques of AIPAC and Israel-supporters so quick to scream "self-hating Jew" whenever criticism of Israel is expressed, a din of gut-denial, meanness, and authoritarian viciousness which we, as Jews, once faced, and now give back tenfold. Intra-Jewish contestation over the fate—and FAITH—of Judaism is now at stake, yet I fear already lost. The gangsters in our midst, earlier Cohen and Schine, under McCarthy, now Adelson under Republicans and a primal force in his own right, transcend the issue of Jewish identity because aligning Judaism itself with hard-core reactionary causes having little to do with religion or Jews. Judaism, the religion, has become politicized and therefore desecrated, instead becoming a defensive shield here in America for a foreign policy of war, intervention, even torture, and domestically, the surveillance of the public, prosecution of whistleblowers, and, consistent with its political attachments, in favor of policies supporting banking and business while opposing labor organization and labor rights.

Why? Perhaps as quid pro quo for US unrestrained, all-out, support of Israel. But it has to be more than blind religious allegiance and solidarity. Israel to American Jews is code for world counterrevolution, the organized stifling of Leftist government and social movements, in popular imagination tacitly linking Left currents—Cuba, civil rights at home, socialism (even detecting traces where none exist)—with pogroms, anti-Semitism, menacing world conquest. The tragedy,

still unexplained to me, is that it was not always thus. For Judaism especially in America had been in the forefront of the human rights struggle, whether union drives or civil rights marches, whether socialism or progressive New Deal Democrats, opposition to whatever degraded the living standards and free human personality of American working people, a record of radical enlightenment that is becoming increasingly thwarted, controverted, disowned, and negated. I welcome an intra-Judaic conversation, no holds barred, one that might distill and expose the Israeli war crimes and reinvigorate Judaism to affirm its former self—very like FDR’s chasing the thieves from the temple.

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Second, from Rachel Corrie (2003) to William Schabas (2015) is a straightline projection in the continuity of Israel’s continued repressive practices, intimidation of critics as today the generalized procedure, to, back then, the physical-concrete procedure, here Rachel’s death, crushed under an Israeli bulldozer as it demolished Palestinian homes, which represents the normalization of repression so obvious as not to be noticed. Rachel Corrie, a non-violent protester from Olympia, Washington, 23-years old, was in Rafah, the Occupied Territories, in March 2003, protesting housing demolition, megaphone in hand, in the path of a giant bulldozer which **DELIBERATELY** ran over and crushed her to death. Outcry from Washington? Outcry from Tel Aviv? What we see is a miniaturized genocide—nothing less, followed by a dozen years of fruitless litigation and recourse to justice. That by itself reveals the moral emptiness of present-day Israel and, of course, its American-backer.

Why after so long, now in the news? Let’s step back. In 2012, an Israeli lower court in Haifa ruled her death an accident. Then last Thursday (Feb. 12) Israel’s Supreme Court upheld the “combat activities exception” of the Civil Wrongs (Liability of the State) Law, which, if Israel pretends to democracy, this totally negates (my “Nazi-style” characterization), in which Israel is not held responsible for whatever takes place in a war zone (this of its own making and elastically defined). The Corrie family’s response to the decision, mother and father all these years seeking avenues of redress, was this: “We had hoped for a different outcome, though we had come to see through this experience how deeply all of Israel’s institutions are implicated in the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli military.” An utterly rotten, corrupt judicial system, familiar to the world in so many instances, not least the shelling of UN schools in Gaza killing dozens. Again, even a murmur of criticism from Washington, the much vaunted world champion of human rights?

Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, (surprising it’s still allowed to function), has pointed out that the Civil Wrongs Law of 2002 has been amended many times, always on behalf of the military (I might pause to mention the similarity in reasoning behind the Status of Forces Agreement that the US has demanded acceptance of in Iraq and elsewhere, to protect service members and private contractors alike from the legal jurisdiction of courts for crimes committed), so that **IMPUNITY** takes on an absolutist quality not quite up to democratic snuff. In 2012, the Law, again amended, introduced, according to Adalah, “near-insurmountable obstacles to justice, accountability and redress for civilian victims harmed by acts of the security forces” in the Occupied Territories.

Third, ongoing social misery in Gaza that happens to make the Washington Post (Feb. 14), but of long-standing duration, daily intensified as Gazans sink further and further into a vortex of



degradation and inhuman conditions. And where is Israel, its neighbor and oppressor? Insouciant, bold, vindictive as if God is twisting its arm to bear down, crush, now a whole people, not just Rachel Corrie. In the Post article are there photographs which cannot be fudged in their prima facie indictment of Israel for war crimes. Little boys standing in rubble don't lie. Babies dying from the cold don't lie. The elderly who are hunched over open fires—all of these and more before us—don't lie. William Booth, from Khan Younis, reports: "In almost every way, the Gaza Strip is much worse off now than before last summer's war between Israel and Hamas. Scenes of misery are one of the few things in abundance in the battered coastal enclave." Booth continues, "The economy is in deep recession; pledges of billions in aid have not been honored.... Diplomats, aid workers and residents warn of a looming humanitarian crisis..."

Not only Israel, we also see international collective denial of Gaza's suffering, as though human life does not matter—the latest example of social psychopathology, in which deniability trumps realism. Here is the rather sober comment of a well-known Gazan economist, Omar Shaban, to whom I shall give the final word: "After every war, we say it can't get worse, but I will say this time is the worst ever. There is no sign of life. Trade. Import. Export. Reconstruction. Aid? Dead. I'm not exaggerating when I tell my friends abroad: Gaza could collapse, maybe soon."

FEBRUARY 20, 2015

### **Obama's Attack on Privacy**

Fascism like ice cream comes in many flavors, and for ruling groups the taste is refreshingly good. We have a POTUS for whom privacy and civil liberties, mouthed ad infinitum (indeed the more violated, the more praised), are archaic if not also despicable rights which must be curtailed in the name of National Security. Freedom is inverted on its alleged behalf, the upshot in America a campaign of surveillance by government on the people wholly violating principles and professions of democracy. Today, vanilla, as in spying, eavesdropping, recording, storing of bulk data; tomorrow, strawberry, as in the manipulation and depersonalization of the people, preparatory to shaping a mental-set favorably inclined to a social footing of permanent war, hierarchical business, financial, and industrial structure, and an ideological regimentation which glorifies the State as the protector of the selfsame privacy and civil liberties which have been degraded and demolished as the condition of peace and justice. The day following, butter pecan... Nirvana, under capitalistic-militaristic realization. (Flavors may differ according to particular historical development and location, but the totalitarian paradigm in which the public is subordinated to Higher Powers of supposedly their own creation nonetheless holds, the Good Humor Man being Dr. Strangelove in disguise.)

Not a pretty picture, but not an exaggeration either. Fascism stripped of the concentration camp and the gas chamber (which were not ends in themselves, but implementing mechanisms for achieving the "greater good" of Order, Power, National Security) has thus far displayed a systemic uniformity whether Germany and Italy in standardized form or now America, underlying structural sameness as the others but gilded to suggest liberal humanitarianism: to wit, the interpenetration of business and government, more specifically and accurately, Capitalism and the State. Capitalism possesses its own internal organs of repression, classically, the wages-system, but more apt, the framework of income distribution and its correlative perquisites of status and recognition, fluidly

translated into power; how much greater, then, its contribution to the hierarchical features of the State, embodied in its militarism and pursuit of war, expansion, glory! I am speaking therefore of partnership at the highest levels, separable spheres of interest, influence, and power which by necessity become integrated, fashioned into one, to service the requirements, and maximize the strengths, of both.

Interpenetration sounds harmless enough, a normalization of political structure and culture which had its capitalistic antecedence in the system of mercantilism. (Maurice Dobbs, “Studies in the Development of Capitalism,” remains a classic on the subject.) In America, we early become exposed to the folklore of 19th century laissez-faire capitalism and the glorious, pacific Open Door, when in reality US international trade, combined with expansionist-interventionist features, has made the label and what it describes so misleading (here William Appleman Williams to the rescue in several studies), which provides the basis for modern capitalism in America, a paradigmatic incipience of structural fascism this early in America.

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Why? Because under Theodore Roosevelt we see the foundations of the Capitalist State, not as mere neo-mercantilism, but in hegemonic struggle for world supremacy, a gradual linkage of economic and political power, initially effected by, and symbolized by, the marriage of the Roosevelt administration, chiefly its Bureau of Corporations, and the House of Morgan, the framework of government-business détente to encourage monopoly capitalism as the source of national power and, for TR, navalism, in the form of the Battleship Navy (or Great White Fleet). From that time forward, we have parallel systemic lines of development melding into convergence: the monopolization of the industrial structure (and the centralization of banking ownership) on one hand, the militarization of national power whose ancillary purpose has been commercial-financial global penetration (euphemistically, non-colonial imperialism) on the other, a robust mix to ensure establishment of a Business Polity, hierarchical in class structure, patriotic in ethos, an emphasis on political-cultural regimentation to hold the pieces together, notably, deferential/assimilative labor and the inculcation of military purpose and values defining social welfare.

Gabriel Kolko, in exposing interpenetration on the domestic side, in “Triumph of Conservatism,” and Howard K. Beale, in his writings on Roosevelt and the rise of America to world power, in foreign policy, together define—though seldom synthesized—the context in which the partnership of Capitalism and the State both is actively sought by the leadership of the respective spheres of power and confirms what Marxian analysis somewhat imprecisely terms structural tendencies assigned to each realm (the state, however, more the creature of capitalism, than as having relative autonomy in order the better to serve in stabilizing, protecting, and expanding capitalism). Interpenetration requires and internally generates ORDER, a natural seed bed for ruling groups—their presence ensured given the hierarchical structure of advanced capitalism—to cement alignments with their counterparts, political and military elites, so that an integrated formation, ready for whatever comes, whether international-capitalist rivalries or socialist revolution, has appropriate military anchorage.

In this light, Obama is symptomatic of next-stage American capitalism, that which followed after the New Deal and emerging out of the World War II context of a changing global power structure, himself not quite a blip on the historical radar, but neither, obviously, a world-class statesman (for

good or ill) and rather predictably if not slavishly following in the footsteps of his immediate predecessors. War, intervention, covert operations, deceit and mendacity in his relations to the American people, opacity in the conduct of government, all follow from the active and further construction of the National Security State, which, under its wing, capitalism and regimentation flourish perhaps like not before, in tandem and seemingly harmless because largely unnoticed, given urgency via the dictates of counterterrorism, and swallowed in the abyss of technology and its presumed apolitical neutrality.

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In the immediate setting, Obama's Technology Summit at Stanford, February 13, we have a microcosm of the foregoing brought up-to-date, in which advanced capitalism and the national-security state form complementary units of the American variant of fascism, the progression toward a state of repression in which consumerism, conquest, and pressures directed to patriotic conformity play a part as the winning combination, like a narcotic, lulling the populace to sleep as depredations are committed in their name. Thus, Obama in his Stanford address calls for the partnership of government and technology companies for the purpose of "information sharing," except that now this example of interpenetration is working in reverse. The companies, led by Tim Cook of Apple, are fighting back, much to White House displeasure, something which Obama is not used to, especially in a carefully arranged Summit to show off agreement between the principals. Cook, preceding Obama to the podium, implied that the technology companies would not wash the government's dirty laundry.

In a setting surprising to many, Silicon Valley was showing backbone, Cook, in particular, upholding the value of PRIVACY as an antecedent right of the American people. (Before going further, I must make two points: in fact, technology companies until now were fully complicit in government plans of massive surveillance, and such surveillance per se smokes out Obama's platitudes about seeking to safeguard the privacy right, an utter untruth though one of his main talking points at Stanford.) Cook's brief speech, as reported in the Guardian by Dominic Rushe (Feb. 13), directly challenged government efforts to weaken the companies' encryption policies, veritably a last defense in protecting privacy. Rushe writes, Cook "warned of the 'dire consequences' in sacrificing the right to privacy in an impassioned speech on Friday as Barack Obama sought to repair a deep rift with the technology industry." Billed as a "White House-organised cybersecurity summit," its purpose, "fostering greater cooperation—and sharing of private information—with Silicon Valley," had less to do with security than bulk data collection, aka surveillance, (mine, not Rushe), Cook saying bluntly, "technology companies had a duty to protect their customers."

This may not be a watershed moment, but so seldom does one find interpenetration breaking down that this is cause for celebration, an influential segment of corporate capitalism rejecting government largesse/protection through refusing to enlist in its militaristic paradigm of national security. Perhaps a passing fancy, in which Apple will be brought back into the fold (it's too soon to know), but what I find encouraging is the possible role of technology as a progressive social force, even if administered under capitalism, in which defense of privacy becomes, and becomes realized as, the irreducible condition for doing business, thereby sending shock waves throughout society. Can America absorb the respect due privacy, a contagion of integrity having widespread ramifying implications, from corporate behavior and social relations to the value system? The assault on

privacy and civil liberties under Obama suggests the tacit recognition and understanding of their subversive nature, an inner freedom of thought and belief, not necessarily mediated through an epistemological screen of capitalist institutions, that could lead to the basic questioning of the social order. Surveillance does not grow on trees, it is a response to the fear of political-social change.

Rushe notes further, “The highest-profile tech executive at the meeting, Cook said privacy meant the difference between ‘life and death’ for many people.” This assertion of fundamentals has been finally flushed out by Obama’s outrageous conduct, whether as drone assassination (the ultimate violation of privacy) and regime change, or simply here, ubiquitous signs of a Police State through domestic spying. Here call it what one wants, blowback, chickens coming home to roost, or the results of the Snowden revelations (perhaps finally coming into full view) but the Cybersecurity Summit had clearly backfired. Again Rushe: “Cook’s remarks arrived as many in the tech community have expressed concerns about government attempts to weaken encryption—standards for protecting the privacy of data online. In the wake of revelations from the National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, Apple and its competitors have moved to strengthen encryption and faced a backlash from government officials.” I am pleased to observe a chipping away at the Liberal Icon: “The leaders of Apple’s fellow giants in the tech industry—including Facebook, Google and Microsoft—were not in attendance at the White House summit, in a sign seen by many as a snub to the president.”

But here is Cook (generalizing from his own personal outing), moments before Obama: “We still live in a world where all people are not treated equally. Too many people do not feel free to practice their religion or express their opinion or love who they choose. A world in which that information can make a difference between life and death. If those of us in positions of responsibility fail to do everything in our power to protect the right of privacy, we risk something more valuable than money. We risk our way of life.” One doesn’t expect such authentic eloquence from a business leader.

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I credit Obama his nerve. Before the summit he announced new rules of cooperation (interpenetration), and stated at Stanford: “We have to work together like never before to meet the challenges of this information age.... When people go online, they shouldn’t have to forfeit the basic privacy we’re assured as Americans.” Yet the main challenge is to escape the totalitarian saturation of recording, monitoring, and storing our very words. (FBI Director Comey declares, “Criminals and terrorists would like nothing more than for us to miss out,” the McCarthyite analogue of anticommunism, in which the protection of privacy makes one a criminal or terrorist.) Before returning to the events at Stanford, let’s go back four months (Oct. 16, 2014) to see something more of the orchestration/build-up of the White House use of cybersecurity to advance a broadly-conceived counterterrorism agenda having more to do with the US geostrategic position in world politics than with Protecting the Homeland, and at home, introducing social docility to keep capitalist development on track as well as habituation to the notion of permanent war. I refer to Spencer Ackerman’s Guardian article, “FBI director attacks tech companies for embracing new modes of encryption,” (Oct. 16, 2014), time enough to plow the fertile ground of scare tactics.

Whoever thought that ENCRYPTION would be a cause célèbre in the effort to preserve liberty? The FBI, whether under Hoover or Comey, is hardly expected to champion privacy and civil

liberties, and so the reporter begins: “The director of the FBI savaged tech companies for their recent embrace of end-to-end encryption and suggested rewriting laws to ensure law enforcement access to customer data in a speech on Thursday.” Poor Apple, being singled out: “...data encryption such as that employed on Apple’s latest mobile operating system would deprive police and intelligence companies of potentially life-saving information, even when judges grant security agencies access through a warrant.” If the reference is to the FISA Court, one can say without fear of contradiction that it never met a search warrant it didn’t like, and warrantless searches were hardly beyond the pale. Speaking at Brookings, Comey said, “encryption threatens to lead us all to a very, very dark place.” Heaven forbid, one where rights are protected from omnivorous government (mine, of course).

Too, I credit Comey’s nerve: “‘Are we no longer a country that is passionate both about the rule of law and about their [sic] being no zones in this country beyond the reach of the rule of law? Have we become so mistrustful of government and law enforcement in particular that we are willing to let bad guys walk away, willing to leave victims in search of justice?’” As for respect for the rule of law however, “Comey acknowledged that the Snowden disclosures caused ‘justifiable surprise’ among the public about the breadth of government surveillance, but hoped to mitigate it through greater transparency and accuracy.” Ackerman is none too hopeful: “Yet the FBI keeps significant aspects of its surveillance reach hidden even from government oversight bodies. Intelligence officials said in a June [2014] letter to a US senator that the FBI does not tally how often it searches through NSA’s vast hoards of international communications, **WITHOUT WARRANTS**, for Americans’ identifying information.” (caps., mine)

Because I take Comey as prototypical of administration thinking (more smarts than Brennan, not quite up to the caginess of Rice), I’d like to linger a moment longer, specifically, with Trevor Timm’s Guardian article, “The government wants tech companies to give them a backdoor to your electronic life,” (Oct. 17, the next day). My award for opening sentence: “The FBI chief’s call for ‘clarity and transparency’ on surveillance wouldn’t be so laughable if the government wasn’t so aggressively secretive.” Timm writes, “FBI director James Comey wants a US government-mandated backdoor into your iPhone and your Google account. But Comey doesn’t want to call his proposed privacy invasion a backdoor. He doesn’t understand how it would work. And he expects everyone who has been horrified by the NSA’s mass surveillance to just sit back, weaken their personal security and trust that the government will never abuse it.” Timm doesn’t mince words. Pointing out that “Comey is currently on a media blitz,” in which he portrays encryption as facilitating terrorism and rendering law enforcement helpless in apprehending the bad guys, he adds that Comey, “like the NSA, sees encryption for the masses as the enemy—not the type of tool that keeps your medical and bank records safe. He was on 60 Minutes this week calling Apple and Google’s decision a threat to national security, and on Thursday, he gave his first major speech as FBI director, which focused entirely on the dangers of people controlling their own security.”

Comey wants Congress to pass legislation (one wonders, almost why bother in light of FISA’s permissive attitude, except that a show of legitimacy is essential to liberal totalitarianism) which mandates “that all tech companies build backdoors—or ‘lawful intercept’ capabilities, as the government likes to call it—into all their systems, so there will always be a technical hole in the system that the FBI can exploit to read your emails if they hand the company a court order.” Once more, this is four months ago, time enough to build the official campaign against the companies’

encryption practices. As for why his call for “clarity and transparency” on surveillance is a farce, the FBI, hiding its “surveillance capabilities from the public,” then makes “law enforcement sign non-disclosure agreements as they hand out invasive new spying technology. Not surprisingly, he wants “the ‘Post-Snowden pendulum’... to swing back in favor of the government, neglecting to mention Congress has passed literally zero laws reigning in government surveillance.”

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Obama hides behind the fig leaf of cybersecurity when what he really wants is governmental powers to strip away all protections to Americans’ civil liberties and right to privacy, or if not “wants” then works to that end via the powers entrusted to NSA and FBI (regrettably, all but overshadowed by NSA), and that of other intelligence agencies as well as the alacrity with which he employs the Espionage Act. In reporting his Stanford address, the Guardian seems well ahead of the curve in recognizing the threat to privacy. Rushe, in the first of two articles, “Obama responds to hacks and Silicon Valley with ‘emerging cyber threat’ plan,” (Feb. 13), as a run-up to the address. “The White House,” he writes, “announced an executive order to encourage information-sharing between the private sector and the government ahead of [the Summit].” Stating in January that the Summit would bring together a wide assemblage of interested groups “to make sure that we work through these issues in a public, transparent fashion,” Obama underestimated how well others saw through him, Zuckerberg (Facebook), Page and Schmidt (Google), and Mayer (Yahoo) all “declin[ing] to attend, according to the companies.” The tech firms “are still smarting” from the Snowden revelations and “have clashed with Obama over their ability to publicly report on the government surveillance requests.”

Somehow innocuous labels make everything right. Obama’s plan: “The executive order encourages the development of ‘information sharing and analysis organizations’ (ISAOs) that will act as focal points for private sector companies to share information with each other and government....” And we have the White House’s assurance that there will be ““strong protections for privacy and civil liberties,”” because “agencies collaborating with ISAOs” will through “their senior agency officials” see to it.

Rushe’s second article, “White House warns tech world that Sony-style hacks ‘could become the norm,’” a beautiful scare-tactic to force companies into line with government dictates on surveillance, we see, with cybersecurity, the fig leaf become the Maginot Line—we are standing on the ramparts to protect all of us (using the Sony hacking to good effect): ““There’s only one way to defend America from these cyber threats, and that is government and industry working together—sharing information—as true partners.”” Yet, USG’s push “for partnerships on what it has dubbed the ‘defining challenge of the 21st century’ [whatever happened to terrorism?] has “triggered fresh concerns from privacy experts.” And well it might. (mine) Particularly since Obama, three days before, had Lisa Monaco, his “top counter-terrorism adviser,” announce “the creation of a new federal agency to oversee cybersecurity, the Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center,” which would “coordinate intelligence from the FBI, NSA and other intelligence operations”—duplication in the intelligence community, I would query, or greater centralization at society’s expense? Gabe Rottman, ACLU’s legislative counsel, had similar concerns, “both the information-sharing proposal and the director of national intelligence overseeing multi-agency investigations that will predominantly concern the information of private citizens.” (Monaco told the Summit that we are at

a “‘transformational moment,’”—always the sucker punch for clamping down—and hence: “‘The government and the private sector frankly have to work together. We’ve got to be in lock-step.’”

We might go back to Executive Order 13636 (Feb. 12, 2013) which authorized information-sharing, a Framework of Cybersecurity (“Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity”) that already contained the elements of last week’s Summit, i.e., a backdoor way of ensuring capture of the companies’ data holdings. But in one sense, the critics who see redundancy (or overkill) in the CTIIC, are right, for when a government sets out to undermine and make a mockery of privacy and civil liberties, legitimacy, more executive orders, more agencies, are not strictly necessary. Massive surveillance will do very well, thank you. For what are current practices but a cloak for internal subversion—for what else can one call the government’s spying on its own people? Here encryption becomes the unlikely battleground for the preservation of civil liberties, the purpose of the Conference, to break down encryption barriers.

FEBRUARY 27, 2015

### **Obama-Netanyahu Feud**

When thieves have a falling out, it is common to look for the “good guy” as though everything is relative and subject to comparative analysis. Not so here. Assume their feud is real, we still have Tweedledum and Tweedledee, a race to the political-ideological-moral bottom when the scope is enlarged to take in the fuller position of both and the respective countries they each represent: America and Israel, joined at the hip, no matter personality differences of the current leadership, macro- and micro-hegemonic policies, goals, and aspirations to destroy all opposition to their presumed superiority and place in the global sun. To effect their national purposes, which in reality are the same in a sybaritic relationship of mutual war-criminality, drawing sustenance from one another’s extremism, there is an underlying long-term authoritarianism making them absolutely callous to the human suffering each inflicts on the weak.

The weaker, more helpless the better, not only as a testing ground for advanced weaponry, flirtation with the doctrine and practice of total war, and means of societal domestic regimentation, but as part of the psychopathology of conquest, success over the victim merely whets the appetite for more atrocities, more sadism, arrogance, claimed legitimacy in furtherance of what turn out to be fairly ordinary results of statecraft: a permanent-war-footing, militarism a central, justified, largely unexamined value shaping the ethos of righteousness in the use of disproportionate force, contempt for critics and victims alike, and, readily translatable from attitude to action, ground-zero annihilation, preferably through artillery and air power, always to teach the lesson of submission, bowing to superiority, discouraging resistance.

Given the inlaid paradigm of self-appointed proconsul to the world, well-publicized tiffs over specific policy decisions count for naught insofar as endangering the most basic posture of counterrevolution whether regional or global or in fact, for each, both. The US and Israel, Emperor and Praetorian Guard, colossi astride the international order, the intertwining of intervention, assassination, regime change, espionage, each nation cooperating with, and learning from, the other, a perpetual-motion machine lest breakdown, displacement, loss of will occur. Killing becomes the elixir of life, whether Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, for one, ethnic cleansing to inaugurate the New State, then the follow-up, the Palestinian Territories and, chiefly now, GAZA, the Bergen-Belsen of

the Arab world, for the other. Gaza is the war-crime of the new century; so today all Netanyahu is doing is raising the stakes on the partnership—arms will continue to flow, military and intelligence communities to coordinate as one, same old, same old, since the late 1940s.

Why? Americans' love for the Jewish people? Doubtful. Lobbying activities of Jewish organizations in the US? Not sufficient unto itself as an explanation. Rather, Israel had proven itself a trusted ally of the US from the earliest days of the Cold War, perhaps doubly useful because of the pseudo-socialist façade of the kibbutz imagery, providing a welcome crack in the American line-up of friends and allies many of whom were fascist in origin or practice. Geopolitics cannot be gainsaid, a US-inclined military-strategic oasis at the heart of the European underbelly, with ready access to North Africa and the Far East as well. But even geopolitics, in the immediate sense of regional control, hardly reveals a developing affinity of purpose. Israel, by the early 1950s, was code for everything to which America professed a desire to be, strong, ruthless, a beacon of legitimate repression ("legitimate" because unsuccessfully challenged), the worthy protagonist of the forces of evil arrayed against God, democracy, and freedom.

With a Manichean view of these proportions, love always trumps differences of the moment. In truth, it is hard to exceed Obama in the virtues of totalitarianism. Israelis need not worry about being sold down the river; even on Iran, America on his watch has inflicted sanctions and cyber-espionage sufficient to give the most skeptical grounds for assurance. Diplomacy, when it comes to the Enemy, is sleight-of-hand for pressures aimed at capitulation and humiliation. Rather, if Obama is not responsible for the imbroglio with Israel, Netanyahu is, and daily proves himself more dysfunctional to the relationship. This is not surprising, because, a faithful microcosm of Israel's own descent into a collective state of hubris mirroring his own, the relationship itself is a strain on both partners, neither one willing to draw back from a seeming abyss of belligerence, perhaps to keep up with the other.

Where are we now? The internal polity of each eschews peace, a universal blanket of counterterrorism providing cover for a myriad of sins of commission and omission, Ukraine and Gaza co-mixed as foci for a wider conflict embroiling Asia too, with Obama's Trans-Pacific Partnership the economic weapon to take on China, as already the case with Russia, in both cases a geopolitical strategy having military grounding, NATO to the Russian border, the US "pivot" establishing mainline forces in the Pacific. Israel applauds the renewed Cold War, knowing its implications—as deep-grained reactionism—for watching Israel's own back; America applauds the atrocities in Gaza, knowing its implications—ditto—for instructing the weak and powerless in proper lessons of humility toward the all-powerful. When and how will it all end? I am not a Spenglerian; nevertheless, the situation grows increasingly dire, not least because of the bloodless character of the leaders of both nations.

MARCH 2, 2015

### **The Psychopathology of Revenge**

In my recent article, *Obama-Netanyahu Feud: Contrived Bruhaha*, I pointed to commonalities between the US and Israel on geopolitical aims and conduct and the mutual pursuit of counterrevolutionary goals and practices (each nation feeding on the other's hubristic posture in the world), that made the leaders' well-publicized differences over the latter's upcoming address to



Congress mere cosmetics in no way undermining solidarity of purposes in executing regional and global policy. As I wrote, there appeared in the New York Times an op-ed article by Isaac Herzog, the leader of the Labor party in Israel, which mildly criticized Netanyahu for making Israel's security a partisan issue in American politics while actually their overriding position on crucial global matters was the same. This confirmed to me the absence of basic differences, hence, a monolithic mindset, among Israelis, when it came to the domination of others, an abnormal—if you will—penchant for cruelty and insensitivity to the killing and maiming of, here, the people of Gaza, but in fact a disposition to support Rightist governments and parties in the region and beyond. Israel had almost from its founding become a miniaturized America, each one reinforcing and drawing spiritual nourishment from the other's militaristic ethos and claims to moral superiority.

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Before exploring what I am terming the psychopathology of revenge, I turn briefly to Herzog's article to illustrate the operant consensus within Israel, a consensus that has left Gaza a bloody mess of displaced people, a widespread landscape of rubble, social misery, compounded by the destruction of hospitals and loss of essential services, as in the bombing and/or shelling of water treatment plants and electricity grids, and the systematic killing (as in UN shelters) of readily identified civilian targets. By itself, this puts meat on the skeleton of psychopathology—not a word on Gaza, for example, in Herzog's demur over the Netanyahu visit.

Instead, a disagreement over tactics. Isaac comes from Israeli royalty: "My father, Chaim Herzog, first went to Washington in 1950 to help open the Israeli Embassy. Throughout his life, he was committed to the American-Israeli alliance and did his utmost—as a general, diplomat and president of Israel—to maintain the deep bond between the Jewish democratic state and the United States." (The preceding obligatory reference to "democratic" is a case in point of arrogance and self-delusion, especially in light of the notable lack of dissent on policy including the peace process.) Israel can do no wrong, but more important, nor can America, a marriage of political virtue among the blessed. Thus he writes: "[Chaim] realized the intimate relationship between the two countries was based not only on immense strategic interests but also on shared core values. He also knew that Israel must always be grateful to America, which has stood by us since the moment our country was born, and that support for Israel must be a nonpartisan issue in the United States." There, and only there, is where Netanyahu errs. His speech "to the Republican-controlled Congress next week [violating "the bipartisan approach" of his father and of "Israel's other founding fathers and mothers"]—an invitation he accepted without consulting America's Democratic president—is a major mistake."

The content of the speech, however, is not. "I, too," Isaac writes, "am concerned about the possibility that American diplomats could be tempted to accept insufficient guarantees [with respect to Iran's nuclear program] of our safety." Therefore, "Instead of creating the false impression that our interests are allied with only one American party or interest group, we should be reaching out to all Americans—Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, hawks and doves." Not difficult to accomplish, in light of shared principles and strategies. Calling Israel "an oasis of liberty" and, "not only a rock-solid ally in a stormy Middle East but a fellow democracy that upholds the self-evident truths that America is based on... freedom, human rights and the pursuit of peace," there is little that can shake the belief in a psychological-ideological rectitude characterizing the partnership. Yes, have some form of negotiation with Iran, but "keep all options on the table"

while, the implication here, shifting emphasis to punitive means of securing cooperation. Like Netanyahu, Herzog does not trust Obama and wants the US to be firm—the hallowed special relationship, America and Israel, still honored, but needing reinforcement.

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In my earlier article I referred in passing to Israel's having rendered Gaza "the Bergen-Belsen of the Arab world," a very harsh statement, but one on further reflection I believe is justified. How explain not only the merciless killing but also the indifference to it on the part of Israelis? Initially, as I over time became more critical of Israel, I ascribed the behavior to the psychodynamics of introjection: the gut-wrenching, anguished, unspeakably cruel experience of the Holocaust, a process of dehumanization which left the individual in a state of extreme ego-loss powerless to resist both the degraded image of the self and the external penetration of the total context of repression into the psyche, notably, the value system of the oppressor, the jailer, the Nazi. This grounding down of the human personality cannot but leave its scars, as though in struggling for a return to wholeness some of the internal poisons remain. One should not blame the victims for the brutal crimes practiced on them. They are entitled to understanding, at the very least, and actually a good deal more. But the historical experience etched into the mindset of the survivors and passed on to future generations could, and I think did, take on a perverse course, at first, largely unconscious, but then hardened into place as the group-memory of genocide remained in force and the experience of renewed persecution either persisted or threatened.

At this point, clearly not explainable by some form of psychological determinism, but nevertheless, by a natural drive for self-protection, victims find within themselves transformative powers, as in the resolve, "Never again," to liberate themselves from societal- and self-captivity to become strong, if need be, by overcompensating from previous weakness, with the result of adopting for themselves the mindset that had been responsible for holding them down. The toughness of the Israeli is legendary, a toughness, however, drained of the humanistic, life-giving impulses that had heretofore characterized Judaism and its embrace of the stranger, its inceptive radicalism and call for transcendent brotherhood, its respect for the arts—all thought softness today and ill-fitted for present reality. Sartre once described the anti-Semite (which we can enlarge to include the authoritarian personality) as one attracted to the durability of stone.

This is where, I'm afraid, we're at: the prostitution of "Never again" into a solipsistic credo of what might best be called, defensive aggression, which turns out to be not defensive at all. Gaza is like a laboratory of cruelty, different from the gas chamber in quantity more than in quality, a possibility actualized only because of or through the debasement of religious teachings preceded by the breakdown of personality structure and value system under the weight of the Holocaust. Can the spell be broken, the historical-psychological continuity of suffering-transformed-into-revenge likewise broken? I fear that introjection has become a runaway process, that at this point revenge has eliminated an initially passive response to psychological impoverishment, so that the presumed emancipation from the past, the conversion from weakness into strength, takes the hideous form of recapitulating that past under Israel's own auspices as reproducing the Nazi experience in the modern era: Bergen-Belsen qua Gaza, an assertion of might, a warning to all enemies, real and imagined, and proof-positive of the requisite hardness worthy to being taken as America's staunchest ally.

MARCH 11, 2015

## **The “Convenience” of Untruth**

If I may state a vulgarized Leninism, I hope Hillary gets the Democratic nomination, the ideal political “two-fer” in making possible a fresh start for America. Candidate and party are made for each other: a morally bankrupt unity of militarism, corporatism, class dominance of financial elites, all contributing to a national mindset of permanent-war doctrine, global commercial/ideological hegemony, cosmetics as stand-in for a social safety net, and the ruthless disregard of democratic principles of governance. Is it really that bad? Probably worse. Liberal fascism is not an oxymoron, rather a useful description of the perversion of Center-Left politics and thought in America successively enlarged after the New Deal so as to appear sympathetic to principles of equality, social justice, and world peace while achieving opposite results, including systematically supporting a class-state of heightened wealth concentration meanwhile discouraging potential dissident groups, chiefly, blacks, labor unions, immigrants, the working poor from mobilizing to create a more just polity and social order.

Hillary is the poster woman for all that is repellant about class dominance, capitalism’s militarization as starting point for domestic social regimentation to ensure popular acceptance of financial and corporate leadership in US policymaking and definitions of national self-interest. Here add the element of security, a perfect witches’-brew of the Business State assuming global proportions. There is something uncanny in her make-up, an urge to power deliberately left undisguised, as if to impress the people with the duty of authoritarian submission in the name of higher values. Hillary the Statue of Liberty in sunglasses, on the ramparts of freedom to protect us all from dangers open-ended, often unspecified, every pursuit of self-aggrandizement converted into a virtue, most recently, her presumed effort in defense of the rights of women (a sick joke) or her claims of government transparency via the selective release of official USG documents as Secretary of State from her private account.

I want her to run, to win the nomination, and then whatever follows. A Republican victory could not be worse, for at least Americans would know what to expect, and could either acquiesce or fight back. But a Hillary triumph courts the danger of becoming enveloped in a sea of false consciousness—except that it also raises the prospect, finally, after decades of bipartisan consensus, of political upheaval, in which the Democratic party is exposed and the seeds planted for its displacement or, at the very least, a third party in militant opposition. Hillary unwittingly can sound the tocsin, an awakening to the structured loss of democracy, brought about by its putative friends. If by chance Elizabeth Warren were the party’s nominee (I expect little departure from her on foreign policy, but her domestic is something else), that would only postpone the inevitable: the discovery of the rottenness of the Democratic party, which one candidate at the top could not hope to rectify. No, Hillary all the way, in the hope of party-destruction and subsequent realignment.

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Can one blame her? Hardly; her political antennae have always been up, and, correctly, she has gauged the reactionary pulse of the American electorate (and that of her own party), an ideological framework in which, beyond the personal power-demiurge, she may actually believe, making for a more unitary personality than the mere opportunism which appears on the surface. Too, she wears her reactionary credentials honorably in the sense of being married to, and sharing the principles of,

perhaps the biggest fraud in presidential history, the Janus-faced William Jefferson Clinton, whose capitulation to wealth and militarism has become a superb marker for contemporary liberalism. The Foundation is the least of his explorations into Greatness, his dynamic duo of Robert Rubin and Larry Summers and the prodigious gift to Corporate America of deregulation ranking near the top of the dung heap. And when foreign policy is fully scrutinized, we have an indictment of Democrats' claims to representing a progressive social force, now adumbrated by the consummate forfeiture of democratic principle by the Obama administration on both domestic- and foreign-policy counts.

Hillary is a product of her political-ideological times, no better, perhaps no worse, than her predecessors and surroundings. America has been in the business quite literally of war and war-preparation for some time; it has also done little for the internal democratization of the social system, black leadership today especially callous in that regard. I ask: Would Dr. King favor and employ drone assassination? Would Dr. King provoke regime change, openly court confrontation with Russia and China, unleash covert action to weaken or topple governments with which the US disagrees? Remembering his Poor People's Campaign I wonder would Dr. King applaud Obama's closeness to the banking and business communities? Would he see the recent celebration of the 50th anniversary of Selma, in light of America's overwhelming stance of militarization, even filtering down to the local police, as anything other than a sham. I was in Selma for the interim tensions before the famous second march, the beauty and the genuine eloquence of Dr. King's memorial in Brown's Chapel for James Reeb, murdered on the streets of Selma, and as I look back I have only contempt for Obama, Hillary Clinton, and all the humanitarian-fakirs who have trespassed on the rights and dignity of the common people. America has changed, and not for the better.

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The New York Times deserves commendation for breaking the story of Hillary's email/federal records deception, even more, following the story closely, as in this article, Alan Rappeport and Amy Chozick's "Clinton Tries to Quell Email Controversy," (Mar. 10), which began, "[HRC]... defended her exclusive use of a private email address during her time as secretary of state as a matter of 'convenience,' saying about 30,000 of her work-related emails would be made public, but that thousands more that she deemed personal had been deleted." Savor the element of personal discretion—and will the public see those not deleted and deemed not work-related? Transparency, thou outmoded, obsolete factor in a fast-disappearing democratic system of governance. And for chutzpah: "I thought using one device would be simpler; obviously, it hasn't worked out that way," she said in her first public comments since the issue emerged last week." The admission is lame, and even then, forced because she got caught.

Adding insult to injury, because determination of personal-work related remains with Clinton alone, she says: "I feel that I have taken unprecedented steps to provide these public emails; they will be in the public domain." (Sorry, but I hear echoes of Bill's admission of Lewinski in the background.) Thus in a 20-minute news conference addressed to women's issues and the Republican open letter to Iran, there was little about the emails, or as she said: "I fully complied with every rule." The State Department announced that it would "publish online [in one batch] the full set of emails provided by Mrs. Clinton from her time as secretary of state." Again, she is the sole arbiter of relevance. In passing, the reporters noted that after the revelations, "Clinton fielded political questions from reporters, something she had not done since her 2008 presidential

campaign.” That will no longer be possible: “But as she shapes her 2016 campaign, Mrs. Clinton must wade back into politics, prompted not by her own careful timing but forced by a controversy over whether she intentionally used a private email account to skirt federal records requests for State Department correspondence.” The best-laid schemes o’ mice and men gang aft agley.

My New York Times Comment on the Rapoport-Chozick article, same date, follows:

Will this stop the Hillary locomotive for the nomination dead in its tracks? Obviously not, the Democratic party in full damage-control mode will work around Mrs. Clinton’s felonious attempt to evade the LAW. We expect this from the Clintons, a superb training ground as Bill’s wife for grazing the truth, self-enrichment, contempt for transparency. Everything however untoward can be explained by/dismissed as a matter of “convenience”—her damaging admission that she is too used to free passes to notice for what it is: criminal intent disguised as convenience.

Mrs. Clinton’s statement, “I fully complied with the law,” should automatically disqualify her from a run for the presidency, except that that is now par for the course in Washington. Too, that she has been defensive with respect to the press corps augurs poorly indeed for honesty, sincerity, transparency—instead, more like a case of paranoia (to which the Clintons are no strangers).

Should one rally to her defense because the Republicans have proven themselves crypto-fascists, as in their latest anti-constitutional escapade? No, the lesser of two evils is still evil; in this case seeking to cover over strong prowar tendencies with fool’s gold, i.e., the patina of liberalism.

If the Democrats can swallow a potus whose trademark is drone assassination, why not a Hillary who in advocating for troop surges has proven she can belt them down with the big boys? This contempt for the public should be sent packing.

MARCH 13, 2015

### **Obituary of the Democratic Party**

Ordinarily I detest alliteration as the contrived deliberate mind-numbing of critical sensibilities, but here it works—and deserves usage. “Pusillanimous”—my trusty Webster’s Ninth Collegiate—is defined as, “lacking courage and resolution: marked by contemptible timidity” (1586), akin to cowardliness, itself opening a definitional Pandora’s box: “COWARDLY, PUSILLANIMOUS, CRAVEN, DASTARDLY mean having or showing a lack of courage. Cowardly implies a weak or ignoble lack of courage; pusillanimous suggests a contemptible lack of courage; craven suggests complete extreme defeatism and complete lack of resistance; dastardly implies behavior that is both cowardly and treacherous or skulking or outrageous.” Take your pick. Lack of courage: weak or ignoble; contemptible; defeatism; treacherous, skulking. I zeroed in on contemptible, but all equally apply and in fact make up a sound descriptive unit, while Pandora’s box (1579), though grounded in false consciousness, and therefore forbidden to be opened lest the world see the ugliness of its contents, was finally opened by Hillary, now leaving no mistake, which had—again Webster’s—“loosed a swarm of evils on mankind.”

As bad as all that? I think worse. Weak, craven, treacherous, what better characterize a party that uses liberalism to paper over its support for the underlying reality, embedded in a one-dimensional political culture carried forward through a two-party system of unified singular ideological sameness, based on militarism, corporatism, and the psychological triad of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and protestations of exceptionalism. A heady systemic brew Democrats have been fully complicit (indeed proud of their role) in constructing. In truth, even during the New Deal, the period I often go back to in drawing comparisons with the present, and my (still beloved, grievous faults and all) exemplar of presidential leadership, FDR, we find truly humane, socially conscious Democrats fighting an uphill battle in their own party. For each Henry Wallace, still a pale shadow of his 1948 run as the candidate of the Progressive Party, there was a Hugh Johnson whose ear was attuned to the needs of the big industrialists. This is not the place to argue about, be for or against, the New Deal as a total historical context (for saving capitalism was still political-historical priority #1), but please don't forget the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the likes of Rex Tugwell and Harry Hopkins, in which working people and especially the unemployed were given back their dignity, nourishment, a clean place to sleep.

That is what is altogether missing in America today, a genuine PUBLIC SECTOR and the idealization of the term "public" to stand for the people's needs trumping private interests, a sense of commonwealth and community even seen in the artistic, theatrical, and literary realms, yes an authentic spirit of renaissance in the face of massive deprivation and suffering. If I were of age, I could have identified with Democrats of the time, affirming the Wagner Act, unashamedly addressing strangers as brothers and sisters, taking pleasure in watching the Other Party snarl, weave, curse, insinuate Franklin's syphilitic condition. All for naught in the Republican quest for power. But that was then. This is now.

Or in fact, even by 1946 you saw in the Democratic party the fear, near-paralysis, of being labeled "Red" or fellow-traveler, the obsequious, deferential attitude shown toward patriotism, conformity, translated into selling-out the working class, unions, radicals (as a youngster while visiting Washington I attended committee hearings, a bipartisan spewing of hatred directed against all things remotely radical) with the Democrats frequently in the forefront of denunciation. And certainly by the late-'forties, as with Scoop Jackson of Washington State, the party was squarely positioned to advance the Arms Race, fuel the Cold War, and commence the process of war, intervention, regime change—a continuity of Reaction, always with gold-plated (i.e. surface) liberalism, humanitarianism, democracy as smokescreens, growing ever more normalized in the creation of the National Security State. One does not have to recite chapter and verse on Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, JFK, LBJ, etc. etc. to recognize the war/armaments/counterrevolutionary posture contribution made by the Democrats to American global hegemony then till now, indeed, the life-blood of the party's status, appeal to the electorate, inner workings of self-identity. For the record is there for all to see.

Instead, let's turn to the present, to Hillary, whom I discussed previously in CounterPunch, "The 'Convenience' of Untruth: Hillary and the Democrats," (March 11), but today, who, in her presidential candidacy, sheds light on her party by the way it has battened down the hatches in support, shows the retrograde, monolithic, and craven/treacherous/contemptible place it now earns in the pages of history. Of course, when I speak of the Democratic party's obituary I am not to be taken literally, or rather the death notice is meant in only a special sense. Putrefaction is normally a

long-term matter, especially, in politics, when the party has demonstrated capability as a servant of power. This party is more useful to ruling groups (here read military and financial elites) than were its ample funding to be cut off and its placeholders sent out to pasture. By special sense, I mean then not party organization and structure, but inner spirit and former (for a time) self. What has died is the public sense, dedication to the people foremost as the moral obligation of government. Hillary isn't St. George of the Right who slays the dragon of democratic governance, merely the final straw, following her husband and Obama's own destructive policies of intervention, deregulation, trade expansion, great-powers' confrontation, and drone assassination—to all of which she can hardly be said to dissent, as she hammers the final nails into a coffin which long ago should have been lost at sea.

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Here for clarification on the party's submissive, no, for some almost ecstatic, attitude toward Hillary's nomination, I turn to Nicholas Confessore, Jonathan Martin, and Maggie Haberman's New York Times article, "Democrats See No Choice but Hillary Clinton in 2016," (March 12). Forget the theory. Listen to the voices of Democrats, in this quite excellent piece. The reporters are if anything candid in discussing the party: "They [Democrats] shrug off questions about Hillary Rodham Clinton's email habits. They roll with the attacks on her family's foundation, the big checks from foreign governments, the torpid response to her not-yet-campaign." (Enough, one would think, to sink her candidacy.) Too, "They have little choice: As Mrs. Clinton prepares to begin her second presidential campaign amid a froth of criticism and outrage, Democrats are not just Ready for Hillary—as supporters named one pro-Clinton 'super PAC'—they are desperate for her."

Did someone say, placeholders? The reporters continue: "Congressional Democrats are counting on a strong Clinton campaign to help lift them back into the majority. Party leaders at all levels want her fund-raising help and demographic appeal. And from the top of the party to its grass roots, Mrs. Clinton's pseudo-incumbency is papering over significant disadvantages: a weak bench, a long-term House minority and white middle class defecting to the Republican Party faster than the Democrats' hoped-for demographic future is expected to arrive." I don't know whether to laugh or cry, especially about "demographic appeal," but it's clear the party is symptomatic of the American sea-change away from small "d" democratic society and government. While Confessore et. al. miss the big picture, they perhaps unwittingly put Hillary on the same rhetorical plane as JPMorganChase: "Mrs. Clinton, many Democrats say, is simply too big to fail." Or as Sarah Kovner, "a leading Democratic donor and fund-raiser in New York," states: "There is no one else—she's the whole plan. She is by far the most experienced and qualified person we could possibly nominate. Not even on the horizon but on the far horizon."

On the far horizon: more than the usual political encomium, this is a call to the colors, rally around the flag, no criticism, just close ranks. The reporters note: "Her party's urgent need for her to succeed explains, in part, how Democrats have responded to revelations that Mrs. Clinton used a private email address for all of her government correspondence as secretary of state and skirted public and congressional records requests. But it also suggests the Democrats' peril: Should Mrs. Clinton falter, the party has no easy way to replace her." This is beginning to sound like a cult of personality, the Joseph Stalin of Chappaqua. And even when there is modest criticism, it is turned to advantage, as, referring to Hillary, when Jack Markell, governor of Delaware, says: "Anytime

you have all your eggs in one basket, it is a concern. Although if you're going to have them all in one, this basket is a good place to be.'"

Her candidacy, the full-court press this early, is a shrewd power play vis-à-vis other possible candidates, staff defections, and big-time donors—Hillary going with the forces of wealth and privilege (mine, not the reporters), although they do note: "For two years, Mrs. Clinton has been the prohibitive favorite for the Democratic presidential nomination, keeping the party's strongest alternatives on the sidelines and depriving those who remain of potential donors and staff. Senior Democrats have built a multimillion-dollar political infrastructure to pave the way for her candidacy... [and] gently tamped down concerns that the party was too heavily invested in a single flag bearer." Whatever the ideological congruence defining both candidate and party (again, mine), the question of money is never off the table: "For House Democrats, Mrs. Clinton's impending candidacy has figured centrally in pitches to donors, who are skeptical of their chances to win the chamber back.' Yes, indeed, go with a winner. Steve Israel, House Democrats' campaign leader, is excited about "between 60 and 75 truly competitive districts in the House," riveting attention on Hillary (and telling us, in his statement, much about where the country is—i.e., support of a known war-hawk and one who places herself above the law): "Hillary Clinton is the only Democrat I know who can go into every single one of those districts and do well—with the possible exception of her husband."

The account continues, as when Jason Kander, Missouri's secretary of state, now running for the Senate, echoes the acclaim for her: "When people bring up the presidential race to me, they bring up Secretary Clinton. I have just not had many conversations where people talk about different candidates.'" Will there even be challenges in the primaries, I wonder; will there even be primaries, particularly in light of Democratic vested wealth capable of shooting down Elizabeth Warren or other possible candidates. As the reporters conclude, "Mrs. Clinton, most Democrats believe, is the solution [to countering the vast resources of the Republicans, e.g., 'conservative outside groups are on track to raise more than \$1 billion during the 2016 cycle,']. No other candidate combines her ties to big donors with her appeal to small ones." She is a party-unifier, carrying it, not to the Finland Station, but to the bank vaults of Wall Street.

My New York Times Comment on the Confessore-Martin-Haberman article, same date, follows:

The Democratic party has built itself a rotten edifice made up of emulating Republicans on major policy issues and frankly deserves to go under, the total inversion of its former, New Deal, self. Hillary is its appropriate candidate, war-hawk par excellence, wedded, as has been and still is Bill, to the financial community, ready and willing to finesse every shortcoming, in sum, exhibiting the moral bankruptcy of American liberalism: Centrism degenerating into crypto-fascism.

The party's dependence on Mrs. Clinton, and reasons thereof, reminds one of passengers on a sinking ship slashing each other's throats in the pell-mell rush for the lifeboats. This has been a while in coming, virtually a consecutive development following World War II, each Democrat further mired in militarism and endeavors to remain unilateral global kingpin. (I wish Brecht were around to capture the opportunism/cynicism of such a crew.)

Will NYT, after exposing the Clinton email scandal, dutifully fall in line and support her, or will it keep alive the spirit of journalistic integrity and press for further exposure? The



lesser-evil thesis merely capitulates to further evil. I fully expect the worst, whichever party wins in 2016; neither one has legitimate claims to honest, constitutional government. In the immediate case, let the Democratic party cease to exist, given its betrayal of the people's trust, an ignominious cluster of time-serving politicians an affront to political-moral decency.

MARCH 23, 2015

### **Israel vs. Judaism**

[When I say "humanism hangs in the balance" I mean that Judaism today is in danger of losing its moral-ethical-universal foundations by the stand it takes toward Israel's policies and historical record of ethnic cleansing, well-antedating Netanyahu, what already regrettably seems or appears to be a losing battle. Israel has the potential both of destroying itself and bringing Judaism down with it in what I believe is a paroxysm of hatred and paranoia of overcompensating conquest. As the reader will see, I am rooting with all my heart for Judaism, which I proudly affirm against the baseness of contemporary Israel.]

Analysis of Israel's election which declares Netanyahu freer to seek less doctrinaire policies, greater mobility to pursue peace, is absurd and duplicitous. His statement about resisting a two-state solution condemns Israel—and his leadership—to the opprobrium of humankind, with the grisly attack on Gaza itself marking both as engaging in WAR CRIMES. Yet by his election, the Israeli people—knowing Netanyahu's declaration rejecting a two-state solution, and his further allusion to racism by disparaging Arab-Israeli citizens' electoral activity—have shown to the world an uncompromising, xenophobic, militaristic people unworthy of Judaism and the Torah. (The presumed recantation, walking back on the two-state solution, is a cunning change-of-heart filled with caveats, expressed and implied, which fully negates a meaningful accommodation or approach to peace. Simply, Andrea Mitchell in her interview caught him with his pants down.)

What a denigration of the memory of the Holocaust, this Nazi-like bludgeoning of the Palestinians. Have Israelis abandoned all conscience? Sunk into a self-serving mode of denial? Believed it possible that through sheer power and force they could assert dominance in face of the moral law? What is happening to my beloved Judaism? To the teachings about welcoming the stranger, about reaching out to the dispossessed? Judaism is DISGRACED by Israel's policies of internal colonialism and contempt for the treatment of fellow humans.

Anti-Semitism will rise in Europe and the rest of the world because of Israel's conduct, a burden on world Jewry because of the falsification of Jewish values and time-honored record of siding with the innocent, the deprived, the underdog. Netanyahu at the Wailing Wall (as shown in photographs after his victory) is an act of impiety. Consider, would Einstein have shelled or bombed UN schools/shelters in Gaza that were crowded with people thinking they were safe and escaping the onslaught? Would Schwerner and Goodman have shelled or bombed hospitals, the injured lining the corridors? Would Aaron Copland and Ben Shawn have shelled or bombed water treatment plants and electrical grids? Would and did the IDF and Netanyahu do these despicable acts, the more despicable because the Israeli population looked on and in many cases applauded? [My description in an earlier CP article of the residents of Siderot, who gathered on the hillside through the night in

festive mood cheering as Israeli artillery shelling rocked the Gaza countryside, the while munching and drinking, some on sofas dragged out for the occasion to have a better view.]

Why any further pretence of Israel as a democratic nation? In the campaign itself, there is seldom the mention of Gaza, and that—confirming the near-universality of complicity in war crimes—including Herzog and Livni. Protesting high rents may define the “Left” in Israel, but a Left fully acquiescent in mass killing, walls, blockades, discrimination; hence, a Left in name only, shorn of all connection to the universality of humankind. For Israelis, Gazans are cannon fodder or a lower species (a willful distortion of the Chosen-People notion which, because of assumed superiority, encourages the ethos and cult of militarism found in Israel). Here I’m reminded of Sartre’s “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” one who possesses the durability of stone—a hardness of soul and heart allowing nothing to penetrate. As with Netanyahu, we see now the theory and practice of cruelty emblematic of a whole people; for it is difficult to say whether he eggs them on, or they he. Sartre’s Anti-Semite could readily be applied as a collective portrayal of Israelis.

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Let’s go back to the day after the election, Jodi Rudoren’s New York Times article, “Win Sets Netanyahu on Path to Remake Israeli Government,” (Mar. 18), in which, despite evidence to the contrary, she offers the prospect of his having a freer hand to move toward the Center: “Israelis emboldened [him] with a clear mandate in balloting on Tuesday, paving the way for him to lead a right-leaning and religious coalition that could be far easier to control, since his own party holds many more seats now.... While the new coalition will almost certainly be more purely conservative, it is also more narrowly tailored, potentially freeing its leader of the constraints that often guided his last government.” Nominally moving rightward, he “also has gotten rid of extremists in his own party, Likud, and shrunk the Jewish Home party, which he often placated over the last two years by expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank.” For the coalition to be “more narrowly tailored” suggests eliminating fanaticism for what is “more purely conservative,” in this case, in the words of Uzi Arad, his former national security adviser, “more ‘tough pragmatism’ than ‘stiff defiance.’” I find it otherwise, not only in the complexion of his coalition partners, including ultra-Orthodox parties, but his continued mobilization of opposition, if not worse, to Iran, and, domestically, everything from settlement construction to regional displays of toughness (e.g., once more, Gaza) to the precepts of market fundamentalism in shaping Israel’s economy.

My New York Times Comment on the Rudoren article, March 19, follows:

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Anti-Semitism will rise in Europe and the rest of the world because of Israel's conduct, a burden on world Jewry because of the falsification of Jewish values and time-honored record of siding with the innocent, the deprived, the underdog. Netanyahu at the Wailing Wall is an act of impiety.

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Update: consider Jason Horowitz's NYT article, "Do the Democrats and Israel Have a Future Together?," (March 21), which reveals domestic forces of Reaction in full-court-press propaganda mode to bring the Democrats into line in support of Israel. Perhaps the whole topic is artificial if not ill-considered given the overwhelming bipartisan support for Israel in America regardless of particular political leadership on either side. Tempest in a tea pot? Probably, because Israel stands in the eyes of America's political, military, and intelligence communities as code for a still deeper affiliation or attachment, spearhead for US global hegemony, not unlike Britain and NATO, in strategic importance for America's whole counterrevolutionary agenda (rapidly extended now to the Far East through Pacific-First and the Trans-Pacific Partnership) to secure ideological dominance, the protection of oil supplies, and effective resistance to Left-movements for social change. Israel and America, bedfellows eternal, as the covers of militarism are neatly tucked in.

Horowitz has a stellar cast of notables seeking to patch up differences—Elliott Abrams (Bush adviser on the Middle East, and as I recall, back further, architect of repression in Latin America), Ann Lewis, (close to both Clintons), Malcolm Hoenlein (Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations), for starters, AIPAC, and crème de la crème, Pastor Hagee's Christians United for Israel (CUFI), not to be gainsaid in organizing pressures on Israel's behalf—a blue-ribbon effort by shock troops to influence US policy. Add John Boehner, Michele Bachman, Ted Cruz, and Lindsey Graham to the foregoing mix and one has a revelatory look at, more than a Netanyahu cheering section, what constitutes Israel's appeal for Americans: surely not the religious principles and faith of Judaism per se, but the retrograde policies of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and the application of force to resolve all problems and reduce all tensions.

Horowitz writes, "While a deepening polarization among American Jews about Netanyahu [I'm skeptical of this] puts Obama's potential successor, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a politically uncomfortable position, it is the transformation of Israel into a partisan issue that fills Democratic Jewish officials with dread." This shouldn't (mine), but for safety sake we see college campuses targeted, "trips of movie stars to Israel," the usual, even African-Americans and Hispanics, an important part of the party base, enlisted in the cause, Republicans meanwhile active in pushing for a political realignment, as in Netanyahu's speech to Congress, to bring Jews still further into their ranks. I will skip over the activities of Ron Dermer, a one-man dynamo, as Israel's US ambassador, or Sheldon Adelson himself, a one-man Las Vegas version of Fort Knox, except to mention the former's statement, popular no doubt in its sentiments for CP readers, but for me reeking in duplicity in one respect—the use of cultural issues to obfuscate the need for first addressing the more fundamental class and structural issues relevant to the democratization process as the vital context for then realizing rights dear to all of us. Horowitz quotes Dermer in what I take to be

cynicism of the first water—forget Gaza, forget repression of internal dissent, forget support of dictators as standard procedure, none matters when you look at Israel’s civil liberties record (which I find wanting): ”I think the progressive case for Israel is an easy case to make,” Dermer stated, “We’re the only country that’s had a chief justice of the Supreme Court, a speaker of the Knesset and a prime minister who were women. You have gay rights in Israel.... And then you have respect for minority rights in Israel.” I’m not buying. Tell it to those living for decades under Israel’s iron heel. Tell it to the children who survived the saturated bombing and shelling of Gaza blinded or with limbs missing. Tell it to the young men who have been unemployed and socially humiliated. But don’t, Israelis, tell it to yourselves, because in your state of profound denial, you won’t believe that others have been hurt by your actions.

My New York Times Comment on the Horowitz article, same date, follows:

Hora circles and singing Hebrew anthems will not cover over the war crimes Israel has committed in Gaza, nor its ethnic cleansing in general. Why is it Israel has the most favorable support in America from extreme right-wing groups? As for liberal Democrats, support there confirms the bipartisan consensus on war, intervention, drone assassination. A liberal Democrat is a Republican in everything but name.

I grieve for Judaism. It was not always thus. Like Dermer I was raised in Miami Beach but decades earlier, my parents hardworking successful Lincoln Road merchants from Minsk (Mom) and Pinsk (Dad). I was deeply proud, as a young radical, of my Jewish heritage.

Why not! Jews from say 1900-60 stood in the forefront of humanistic philosophy and learning, interpreted Torah in universal terms favoring welcoming the stranger and helping the underdog. In the arts, Jews were in the forefront of music, art, literature. I mourned the execution of the Rosenbergs, and like many other young Jews I threw myself wholeheartedly into the civil rights struggle (yes picketing Woolworth’s in Harvard Square to Mississippi Freedom Summer and Selma) and antiwar movement.

World Jewry today led by the example of Israel forfeits its Jewishness via slavish devotion to a Militaristic State which oppresses the proverbial Other. Adelson speaks for many—but not me. Let the charade of Israeli democracy go on. God knows better. God, oddly, has always been for the victims, not the oppressors.

MARCH 27, 2015

### **Whither America, Neo-Fascism?**

Let’s not bandy about terms. “Fascism” (aka, the militarized face of capitalism in its advanced stage of development) reveals the historical integration of political-structural-ideological factors, among others, pointed toward a totalitarian mindset of consensus on the values and policy of hegemonic expansion, the “Neo” component merely being the liberal patina to gloss an essentially traditional Rightist posture of class-rule and socio-cultural regimentation at home, commercial-financial penetration, the rigging of the international trade and monetary systems, alongside their corollaries, war, intervention, and regime change abroad. In sum, pretty much where we’re presently at. To say, therefore, as I do here, that the US inclines toward fascism, does not mean

necessarily a permanent indictment, the inevitability of a one-way street toward the concentration camp and gas ovens, and in fact in its present guise there is no need for overt repression, at least of the Homeland, when the fictions of democracy, liberty, and market freedom ring the air. As for core-destructiveness, that can be, and IS, projected outward instead, as in incinerating whole countries (e.g., Vietnam) and enabling dictators to forge systems of imprisonment for their own people whenever the respective national interests coincide (from Latin America to Asia and beyond), meanwhile, again for the Homeland, infusing the folk with self-righteous pride of achievement.

As bad as all that? Yes, gradually fewer exits, rest stops, u-turn opportunities for that one-way street as America knuckles down to the realization that its unilateral global domination following World War II is no longer feasible, is in fact breaking down, with the rise of new centers of power and a decentralization of the World System. Before, it had everything its own way, buying and selling “friends and allies” at will in sustained counterrevolutionary mode; no longer, for the natives are rising up, piercing the disguises and subterfuges of liberal humanitarianism, only angering Behemoth to raise the stakes, a more forcible world response accompanied by pressures for greater conformity at home. To all intents and purposes, America is a One-Party State when it comes to militarism, from defining the national budget to infusing society with a cultural spirit of superior destiny in fighting Evil—anything less being soft on a multitude of enemies waiting in the wings (many, of course, given birth and sustenance through our own actions in heightened Cold War fashion, i.e., the Taliban, conversely, death squads in Central America, the military dictators in Chile, having the effect of creating opposition to American policy heretofore neutral or even friendly).

Behemoth scratches, more of the world’s population rises in protest. Cuba, earlier, Venezuela, a more recent example. And that, in our neighborhood. What of the Middle East, South Asia, parts of Africa, even restiveness in the EU? Hegemony is becoming frayed at the edges, summoning the bugle call to National Greatness. Obama wears Bush’s shoes, a continuity of self-justifying arrogance which, in the near future, offers little prospect of change, and rather, the intensification of: Neo-Fascism, political, structural, ideological, exemplified in status quo consensus, interpenetration/co-partnership of the State and capitalism, an ethnocentric defensive (at once military and psychological) shield. The synchronous workings of the three ensures the narrowing of societal purpose, a holding action against history done in the name of history. Call it the prerogatives of Exceptionalism, to save the world, or the inevitableness of economic concentration (a light-hearted case of monopolization, this week’s \$41B merger of Heintz and Kraft to the tune of “Everybody’s doing it”), but as American capitalism monolithically proceeds, it grows more belligerent, more appetitive, more war-like. John Bolton’s NYT op-ed (March 26) entitled “To Stop Iran’s Bomb, Bomb Iran,” captures a rare moment encapsulating the national will, a microcosm of pent-up hatred to all things perceived menacing awaiting to explode.

America is on the edge: Democrats sliding further Right, disappearing into the vortex or is it maelstrom of pathologic self-pity over no longer exercising world supremacy and striking out accordingly; business, in turn, not satisfied with deregulation, calling for regression on all fronts, from the social safety net to labor organization, weakening both while making of itself a state-within-the-state, sitting willingly at the feet of the military; and, yes, ideology, a transcendent vision of Capitalistic Godhead, certifiably pure for putting down all resistance. America can’t lose; or, will

April showers bring May flowers? Not if present trends continue. Little on the horizon, political, structural, ideological, gives grounds for assurance that a real alternative to militarized capitalism will arise in politics, that the democratization of capitalism will occur in political economy, or that an hierarchically-arranged orchestration of social values pertaining to class, race, status, legitimating a fundamental inequality throughout society, will finally be brought to an end.

The Bolton article, though a straw in the wind, deserves perusal by CP readers, a fine illustration of what I would term the Paradigm of the Fascist Mindset; here then my New York Times Comment on the piece, same date, follows:

Bolton wants to portray Obama as the Neville Chamberlain of our time. His own recommendation, a la Strangelove, is to bomb Iran, creating a vaster regional turmoil than already exists.

Here Bolton reveals his right-wing credentials pulling no punches, a poster boy for US global militarism (as has been his wont in the past) excelling that of most hawks. Ironically, he underestimates the gift Obama bestows on the Right and on Militarism with policies of war, intervention, regime change, and, the apple of Obama's eye, targeted drone assassination. That Bolton doesn't appreciate how far the US, under Obama, has already veered so far to the Right, suggests his own being out of touch.

With Brennan at his side, and cementing the White House closeness to the military and intelligence communities, Obama is no appeaser, but rather a global hegemonist of the first water. Perhaps what saves America from completely going off the deep end is the conflict among our Patriots, Bolton's critique of Obama being a case in point.

NYT, by all means give Bolton a hearing. I mean that sincerely. Because in that way we have the position of the Far Right usefully articulated. Regrettably, not that it matters, because the nation itself has shifted significantly rightward as it is. There is, on essentials, bipartisan unity, as testified to by the size of the arms budget, support for Ukraine, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, in sum, an ESCALATION in the confrontation with Russia and China.

MAY 11, 2015

### **Capitalism and the British Elections**

The presumed Rightist electoral victory in Britain, Toryism embracing the Conservative and Labour parties alike, may well prove a blessing in disguise, specifically, for driving a wedge into the global Western counterrevolutionary posture headed by the United States in its confrontation with Russia and China. There is a logic to geopolitical Reaction, ever fearful of socialist and/or popular currents of dissent and social change. Hence, the Cold War, and now its renewal.

It doesn't require a Trotskyite mental set to appreciate the potential threat to world capitalism found in Cameron's semi-autarkic stance with respect to the European Union, ultimately disruptive of the unified response needed to carry out America's paradigm of international military, financial, and commercial hegemony, Britain its trusted partner.

Britain's Toryism, obviously complementary to US capitalist fundamentalism, has overreached its intended role as vital, yet subordinate, to Western (aka, American) structural-ideological dominance of the world system. Why? First, because its newly-energized opposition to EU monetary and trade policies, viewed as restrictive of British expansionist claims, undermines the Union's political-economic status in dealing with rival power centers (the much-feared decline of Europe in the face of changing global patterns), a psychological loss not to be taken lightly which only compounds resentment at the hand Cameron and Britain are playing. But second, still more important, the British move away from its participation in the Union portends dire military consequences for the Grand Alliance, i.e., marshaling support for market forces in the face of increasing socialist, nationalist, and just autonomous aspirations struggling for expression in Latin America, Asia, and Africa—with China and Russia forming a congenial setting and background for these endeavors.

Why, therefore, dire military consequences? Simply because the EU, its economic importance notwithstanding, is a surrogate, cover, stand-in, all at once, for NATO, in sum, a military alliance system, anticommunist (as that term has evolved over the decades) in inspiration, the Praetorian Guard keeping America safe from heathenish enemies lurking in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, not to say all of the Usual Suspects. Under US intervention, NATO has been stretched to its limits, so that in keeping with Cameron's vision even that strand of cooperation is breaking down or wearing thin.

Cameron, more effectively than the almost nonexistent American Left, is nibbling away at US global supremacy, for what is America without the seeming legitimacy of NATO (and Far Eastern alliance systems)? Its power may be undiminished, but it would stand for what it essentially is in any case, without the covering fig leaf of liberal rhetoric: an unrestrained bully incapable of mutuality in world affairs. Yes, Cameron is becoming the unwanted bull in the china shop, only America does not yet realize it.

Scotland may well be instrumental in unraveling the West's power concentration, this because quite obviously forcing Britain either to reveal its own repressive side or further watch its declining world position. In either case, the EU will have to re-think its military dimensions and might even decide on a more constructive role in world citizenship. For autarkism, to whatever degree Cameron is able to carry it, has a dynamic all its own, giving urgency to the search for peace—or risk a state of nuclear war.

It is anybody's guess what America would do with the weakening or disintegration of EU/NATO. My own sense is that of more spirited confrontation with Russia and China, having the effect of driving them closer together, and with them, a drastic realignment of the global structure, isolating America further, and possibly without a unified Western Europe to lean on. Obama's current pressures on behalf of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, aimed at the encirclement and weakening of China, is done with one eye on developments in Europe. He can count on Cameron, East and West, but like most of American foreign policy, still working from self-aggrandizing assumptions no longer tenable on the world scene.

JUNE 9, 2015

## **March Toward Global War**

The New York Times (NYT) is a trusted source of Administration thinking, particularly in foreign policy, more, an uncanny, sensitive barometer of deep-lying structural-military-diplomatic events which are presently culminating, beyond the New Cold War brewing since Clinton's international posture in Europe and the Pacific, in the actuality of heated confrontation directed against both Russia and China. Under Obama, the page has turned. No longer can we pretend a chess match in which tough rhetoric and vast expenditures form a comfortable (and highly profitable) surrogate for open warfare, a stage of inner discipline favorable to the suppression of dissent, the creation of industrial-financial-commercial fortunes, and the habituation to violence (transmissible in spirit and acquiescence from urban settings to foreign interventions). Now is different. Capitalism in America has reached the point of definitive sclerosis, a terminal, pathological hardening of the ideological arteries, in which the overgrowth of the fibrous/ interstitial tissue of profit-madness, hubris, and conquest for its own sake, has won out, has defeated whatever has been left of the Constitutional rights of the American formative context. We are a long way from the late 18th century, and with brief exceptions, notably, those brought on by the struggles of the exploited and the persecuted themselves, the progression has been downhill all the way, coinciding with the falsification of government's public trust and the concentration of private wealth and power.

So what is happening now is not surprising. Upper groups, in their narcissistic death wish, want it all, the entire globe at their feet—and sensing ultimate defeat are prepared to bring the curtain down. How else explain the rash of mediocrities scurrying for the presidential nomination in 2016 and receiving support from vested wealth, the latter secure in the knowledge there will be no deviation from the quest for eternal hegemony or bust in trying? How else the glib, unctuous response to climate change, or to drone murder, or to ever more dangerous brinkmanship, confident the show must and will go on—or else!—to the benefit of ruling groups? Here we owe NYT a debt of gratitude for displaying America as it really is, in power-wielding, policy-making circles.

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I have in mind Peter Baker and Steven Erlanger's article, "Russia Wields Aid and Ideology Against West to Fight Sanctions" (June 8), which conjures up a Russian threat to Europe under Putin's megalomaniac unscrupulous direction. The occasion for the article, and Obama's G7 meetings over the weekend is to ensure united EU approval for Russian sanctions over Ukraine, due to expire at the end of June. Obama is unquestionably the principal arm-twister, cheerleader, war monger here, using Ukraine as the symbol of Russian aggression when it was his own cabal of hawks who engineered the coup d'état overthrowing the legitimate government and thus bringing to power one that was compliant with US-EU-NATO policy and wishes menacing Russia's borders. Yet the NYT article refers to Putin's "subterranean—and sometimes overt—efforts" to destabilize Europe through "win[ning] allies in the West." Putin is the new Stalin, possibly still more dangerous and cagey than the original. Here is Biden, last month at Brookings, to set the tone: "As it tries to rattle the cage, the Kremlin is working hard to buy off and co-opt European political forces [no mention of US-sponsored NGOs, staggering foreign military aid, numerous military bases, etc. exercising undoubted influence up and down Europe], funding both right-wing and left-wing anti-systemic parties throughout Europe." The purpose, "to create cracks in the European



body politic which he [Putin] can then exploit.” Although the reporters see no problem about extending the sanctions, they knowingly add: “But there is no appetite for adding more sanctions, as some American officials would like.”

Horror of horrors, among Putin and Russia’s activities, besides expanding RT, its international television network, in delighting to point out “the foibles of the West” to the French and Germans, “American and European officials have accused Moscow of financing green movements in Europe to encourage protest against hydraulic fracturing, or fracking,” from a US perspective, a venomous deed. Thus far, the only concrete proof of support to the European Right has been a \$11.7 M loan to Le Pen’s National Front in France “from the First Czech-Russian Bank in Moscow, which has been tied to the Kremlin.” But where bribery is difficult to prove, there are other forms of Russian influence, “involv[ing],” according to the Political Capital Institute in Budapest, “professional and organizational help.” Parenthetically I’m sure Russia has its own NGOs, too. Dempsey, US Joint Chiefs chair, “has expressed similar worries about what he calls Russia’s “ability to employ other instruments of power”” besides armed force. Out of the mouths of babes, again Dempsey: “President Putin considers NATO to be a threat and will look for opportunities to discredit and eventually undermine the alliance. Putin’s ultimate objective is to fracture NATO.” Correct, though unsurprising. Only Fiona Hill, who worked at national intelligence on Russia, and is currently at Brookings, queried: “The question is how much hard evidence does anyone have?”

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My NYT Comment on the Baker-Erlanger article, same date, follows:

Is Fiona Hill the only sane one left in Washington? For what we are seeing, under Mr. Obama’s direction, is the orchestration toward war. Baker’s article is laughable were it not that it forces the reader to THINK about what’s coming from the other side, to wit, US-led encroachment on both Russia and China, again more acutely by the present administration than its Republican predecessor, in a push for global supremacy.

Were it not for the existence of nuclear weapons, America would in a matter of weeks be engaged in a war with one if not both nations. When historians take the measure of Obama, they will see a synthesis of Joe McCarthy (massive surveillance) and the Dulles brothers (containment expanded into confrontation). I shudder to think of what awaits the world in the coming decade, the architecture already in the works for global conflagration, yes, under American initiative.

JUNE 15, 2015

### **US-EU Prepositioning in Eastern Europe**

While public attention is directed to ISIS the steady build-up to a dangerous, insane-driven confrontation with Russia, part of America’s geostrategic world posture, with a similar if more gradual development directed to China, continues. Imperialism is no longer an adequate designation; not since Hitlerism, a politics of megalomania, having intentional but secondary consequences for economic hegemony, have we seen such uncontrolled passion, largely for its own sake, of global supremacy—and all in the name of democracy, freedom, market fundamentalism,

co-equivalent terms for US Exceptionalism. Not alone, we drag a somewhat willing Europe to boot into this phobic design.

This is not Spenglerian pessimism, but a realistic assessment of boots on the ground, American boots, facilitated no longer by Morgan Chase or Boeing and the whole edifice of monopoly capitalism and its integral formation of war production and military spending, the foregoing obviously very much present, but a qualitative jump now in addition: the fascistic ideological component cementing imperialism, capitalism, and a reawakened racism, as though an exhilarating death-wish, compensation for decades of abuse to others, our nation, our environment, guilt in the deeper recesses of the national conscience, had taken over. Americans are on the warpath for wont of constructive engagement with the problems of poverty, societal malaise, a decaying environment, exacting punishment on whomever and whatever calls our bluff.

Excessive bitterness on my part? Let's look at Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers's article, "U.S. Is Poised to Put Heavy Weaponry in Eastern Europe," New York Times (June 14), fact-oriented, despite NYT's and perhaps the reporters' approval of the flagrant provocation to world peace herein described. Indeed, Russia is always fair game, Putin even more so, in today's governmental-journalistic rush to judgment. Let Ukraine and/or Crimea become the latest accelerant for rationalizing full-scale war planning and the injection of hysteria into the European and American public, episodes which certainly can bear a far different interpretation singly or together when US-NATO participation is factored in (the coup in one case, demonstrable contempt for the people's wishes in the other). The article assumes/presupposes Russia's envelopment of the West, pure and simple: "In a significant move to deter possible Russian aggression in Europe, the Pentagon is poised to store battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and other heavy weapons for as many as 5,000 American troops in several Baltic and Eastern European countries, American and allied officials say."

Peanuts? Small potatoes? This of course is already in addition to an elaborate network of bases, missile deployments, troops facing Russia, the explicitness of the present challenge, however, signaling—and intentionally so, judging from Pentagon statements—the first step toward an even more serious (aka, lethal) placement of military "assets" in the East, converting the Baltics into a war theater and stepping up the propaganda offensive in demonizing Putin. (Pope Francis's recent interview with him given the mental landscape took exceptional courage and portends a role for the Church that has the West gnashing its teeth.) The reporters correctly state that the move "would represent the first time since the end of the Cold War that the United States has stationed heavy military equipment in the newer NATO member nations in Eastern Europe," an admission which compels one to query, why NATO's expansion eastward in the first place? Too, the world has seen that from seemingly small seeds (Obama's "advisers" to Iraq?) luxuriant poisonous foliage often emerges. Heavy equipment requires a human presence; it is not there on gratuitous display.

Ah, the Russian attack on Europe. They write: "It would be the most prominent of a series of moves the United States and NATO have taken to bolster forces in the region and send a clear message of resolve to allies and to Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, that the United States would defend the alliance members closest to the Russian frontier." The US is forever sending messages, to friend and foe alike, the two equally important because unified coalition building is essential both to impending fighting and legitimating war itself, the enemy it goes without saying is simply there, taken for granted. James Stavridis, retired admiral, former supreme allied commander

of NATO, and now dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts, is quoted right on point: “This is a very meaningful shift in policy [more direct NATO activity in the Baltic countries]. It provides a reasonable level of reassurance to jittery allies, although nothing is as good as troops stationed full-time on the ground, of course.” Of course! Stavridis wants more—not to worry, he will have his wish. (So much for the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy as a trusted institution of higher learning, just another think tank on a larger scale like the Council of Foreign Relations serving to rationalize government policy.)

The initial move is “small,” yet, they point out, “it would serve as a credible sign of American commitment, acting as a deterrent the way that the Berlin Brigade did after the Berlin Wall crisis in 1961,” as if to say, recalling the intensity of the early Cold War, and sure enough, we have another think tanker (aptly, Center for a New American Security), Julianne Smith stating: “It’s like taking NATO back to the future.” The current atmosphere shrieks with fire-and-brimstone, in diplomatic language to be sure. We are still in the proposal stage; the equipment has yet to be sent. One Pentagon official: “The U.S. military continues to review the best location to store these materials in consultation with our allies.” But the way is cleared. They report: “Senior officials briefed on the proposals, who described the internal military planning on the condition of anonymity, said they expected approval to come before the NATO defense ministers’ meeting in Brussels this month.”

Our alliance brethren are not wholly innocent nor victims of arm-twisting: “The current proposal falls short of permanently assigning United States troops to the Baltics—something that senior officials of those countries recently requested in a letter to NATO. Even so, officials in those countries say they welcome the proposal to ship at least the equipment forward.” Those like Raimonds Vejonis, Latvia’s defense minister, want the capacity for immediate response, and Mark Galeotti, of NYU, a putative expert on the Russian military, writes, “Tanks on the ground, even if they haven’t people in them, make for a significant marker.” Step by step, first the material, then the personnel, at the ready, the pending arrangement: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, “a company’s worth of equipment,” Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and maybe Hungary, “enough for a company or possibly a battalion.” The Pentagon here is deadly serious (pardon the pun), for it is conducting site surveys in the countries involved, transforming the landscape, “working on estimates about the costs to upgrade railways, build new warehouses and equipment-cleaning facilities,” etc., guarding the weapons warehouses going to private contractors.

Moreover, “an interim step would be prepositioning the additional weapons [already after Crimea, the army stored a large supply of weapons at the Grafenwohr training range in southeastern Germany] and vehicles, euphemistically, the European Activity Set of M1-A2 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and armored howitzers, “in Germany ahead of decisions to move them farther east.” So much for material, current and proposed, for there are army units—e.g., the Third Infantry Division—which are active in the area, along with “stepped-up air patrolling and training exercises on NATO’s eastern flank” (approved by NATO leaders at last year’s Wales meeting) in keeping with the policy change to the more permanent sense of confrontation. Heather Conley, director of the European Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has it exact: “We have to transition from what was a series of temporary decisions made last year.” The pace quickens, despite open violation of the NATO-Russian agreement of 1997 “that laid the foundation for cooperation.” And despite Putin’s recent interview with *Corriere Della Serra*, in which he stated: “I think that only an insane person and only in a dream can imagine that Russia would suddenly attack

NATO. I think some countries are simply taking advantage of people's fears with regard to Russia.'" He said a good deal more in a two-and-a-half hour interview that I will make the subject of another, though related, article.

My New York Times Comment on the Schmitt-Myers article, same date, follows:

If further confirmatory evidence was needed, this article makes clear the US-NATO strategy of, not Kennan-type containment, but outright, dangerous confrontation with Russia, a geopolitical power move fraught with potential cataclysmic effects. Why this madness, unjustified to begin with? Obama has become far more menacing to world peace than his predecessors—and if not he personally, than in his supine willingness to allow the Pentagon and the bipartisan sentiment in Congress to run roughshod over the global system.

Prepositioning by definition is a first step toward the actuality of conflict. It is hardly defensive—as claimed by policy makers. Consider America's global military posture, vis-a-vis China, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the heavy placement of military "assets" in the region, as well as this encroachment on Russia, and the recipe for war is undeniable. The US is spiraling downward into a vortex of messianic, hubristic currents of self-aggrandizement, a nation which exhibits a death-wish (extended to all others, bringing down everyone with us) because of the hollowness of material strivings, the inurement to violence, the satiety of consumption—as many others of the world's population live at or below subsistence.

JUNE 16, 2015

### **TPP the Trojan Horse of Global Conquest**

Trade has never been so misused, no longer merely the vehicle for market penetration, siphoning of natural resources, creation of informal political control of the "host" country; for under Obama with the Trans-Pacific Partnership we see trade as the internally subverting element—barely disguised since China is not part of the proposed 12-nation trade arrangement—which paves the way for the all-important military encirclement and consequent (hoped-for) transformation of China into a subject client-state of American global dominance. The trade provisions, bad to begin with, in favoring categorical US prescriptive norms for the protection and expansion of the American business system, free from all roadblocks to its destructive operations and conduct, and hence, a giant step in realizing the structure of monopoly capitalism, thus far have been criticized by Democrats because of their negative impact on US labor.

Fine, yet myopic and, if ignorance didn't reign supreme in the discussion and criticism, cowardly on the opponents' part. Not even capitalism per se is raised as a defining issue, and rather, outsourcing, the decline of manufacturing, and for some, environmental outlawry. The entire foreign-policy dimension of TPP is ignored, as though a restoration of labor's rights, glibly and grossly sabotaged by Obama, is sufficient for the democratization of American society. It isn't. Domestic and foreign do not a harmless bifurcation make, in today's world the latter, with militarization, the abrogation of civil liberties, interventions, drones, etc. etc. destroys the civic fabric by which all rights, labor's included, blacks included, women included, radicals included, dissenters of every stripe included, enjoy protection. Thus, militarization paves the way for fascism,

whether an American variety, starting from corporatism and flagrant class discrimination, or the more familiar kind, the concentration camp for those who do not toe the mark.

No word on the danger; the collective gaze is averted. Think only, self-interest, regularity, let Washington do it. Do what? In this case, using trade—beyond customary market imperialism—as a disguise, a self-justifying goal for business with the advantages to be gained, but not a word on TPP’s significance as softening the way, part of diverting the gaze, for Obama’s own Pacific-first strategy (as elaborately worked out as the US-EU confrontation with Russia) placing US military “assets” in striking range of China. Carrier battle groups, long-range nuclear-equipped bombers, even coastal vessels, the whole Pentagon ball of death-wax, stand at the ready. Trade in this context is multipurpose, none of which, however, has positive outcomes for the home front, except the further habituation, including the cultivation of false consciousness among the working class, for war and more intervention. Instead, beyond enriching business, it creates the conditions for the more forcible kind of imperialism, war, that risks the annihilation of humankind.

Ideology run amuck appears to be trumping old-fashioned imperialism, while of course keeping it intact and if anything now more effective. That is the danger posed by Obama: present a measure seemingly of benefit to working people, oversell perhaps his own party on its virtues, while simultaneously contemplating what is far worse: the forcible expansion of American capitalism, domestic society be damned.

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For timely clarification, I turn to Peter Baker’s New York Times article, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership and a President’s Legacy,” (June 15) which assumes a) Obama has a legacy worth saving, and b) TPP is the prime candidate or perhaps accomplishment. We know Baker’s privileged status within administration circles and NYT’s largely uncritical view of Obama (even when its national-security reporters blast him openly); yet there remains useful to good reporting from which critical analysis of revealed facts is possible. Here Baker, frankly, is of little help. Noting that “the short walk from the Oval Office downstairs to the Situation Room has all too often meant bad news or grim choices,” he practically confers sainthood on Obama, as though an innocent bystander to events: “Whether it was war in the Middle East, Russian aggression in Ukraine [true to NYT’s party line] or the hunt for terrorists around the globe, President Obama’s foreign policy has felt consumed by guns and drones.”

Not here, however; the trade deal is heartfelt, exceptional statesmanship:

“So the 12-nation trade deal Mr. Obama has been negotiating in Asia took on special meaning for a president eager to change the world. It was a way to leave behind a positive legacy abroad, one that could be measured, he hoped, by the number of lives improved rather than by the number of bodies left behind. And if the Pacific really is the future, Mr. Obama wanted to position the United States to lead the way.” (*Italics mine*)

There is no mention of the armed state of readiness in the Pacific, no mention of China’s exclusion from TPP, just that fellow Democrats “shot down legislation crucial to finalizing the trade agreement,” raising the danger that “the centerpiece of his [Obama’s] much-touted re-engagement with Asia will slip away along with one of the last chances he has to leave his imprint on the world before leaving office.” With praise of that kind one doesn’t need teleprompters, public relations

campaigns, the majesty of office itself to sway peoples' minds. One commentator is quoted correctly though innocent of its damaging effect. Michael Green, now of Georgetown and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and former Asia adviser to Bush, writes: "If the president cannot get [trade promotion authority (I assume he also means fast-track)] through Congress, it is a disaster for his Asia policy." Yes, indeed, for without the cover of trade policy, the military character of "his Asia policy" will stand out naked and clear. Green redeems himself with just the right touch of belligerence: "The administration will be dismissed as lame duck at a time when China is flexing its muscles." One glimpses back to the falling-domino thesis, again alive and well. For Baker himself provided a now-or-never touch. Failure of Congress to approve TPP "would lead to Japan, Vietnam and other putative partners reversing course on economic reforms [think IMF, World Bank and US conditions as defining "economic reforms"] or tariff concessions required to join the multilateral trade zone"—Baker's own giveaway in revealing the one-sided arrangements.

Jon Huntsman, former Obama ambassador to China, said it better: "Domestically we tend to view trade through a political prism by way of winners and losers. In Asia, it's seen as directly tied to our leadership and commitment to the region. A failed T.P.P. would create an influence vacuum that others, primarily China, would fill." (Italics mine) China must be ours (just as, in 1949, when Mao came in, Americans ranted that we "lost" China, as though it was ours all along). We are reminded here of what an earlier generation would have said about the present, namely, that Obama, being perfectly consistent with the past, was pursuing the policy of the Open Door, itself largely geared to China. Yet I suspect one must go further, not the Open Door per se, but its explicit militarization, changing its character from the famous Gallagher and Robinson thesis of "the Imperialism of Free Trade," to free trade be damned, with both its forcible penetration and its wider context of more inclusive global hegemony the accepted goals. That is why TPP is so dangerous (and that extends to its proposer, Obama), its inseparableness, designedly so, from military conquest of all standing in America's way, and due subordination of those nations willing to go along.

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My New York Times Comment on the Baker article, same date, follows:

Obama's legacy is war, drone assassinations, covert operations, on one hand, support—like not since Herbert Hoover—for corporate wealth and multinationals via the restructuring of global trade, on the other. "Legacy" grates on one's democratic sensibilities, given his militarism and unified Rightist posture at home and abroad.

And yet, the whole discussion of the Pacific initiative. Of course, the shielding of corporations from environmental, environmental, and other wayward practices. Of course, gaining market penetration through enforced tariff reductions. Of course, outsourcing and consequent disadvantages to American labor. But these only scratch the surface.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), done for its own sake, is, more importantly, designed to accompany the military PIVOT to the Pacific, i.e., the containment of China, purposefully excluded from TPP membership, and from containment, ultimate isolation and, if possible, regime change and/or dismemberment. Obama is leading the US on a mammoth two front campaign, directed to both Russia and China, demonized with subtle hints of menacing communism, as though recalling the worst of the early Cold War.

Democrats don't get it. They object to the obvious, mired in their own parochial mindset, when in fact Obama is close to waging a war for world supremacy bar none. Outsourcing is imperialism lite; Obama is into imperialism heavy, the militarization of the global design.

JUNE 17, 2015

### **Obama's War Machine Inches Forward**

The US is spoiling for war, cataclysmic consequences notwithstanding, Russia the near-target, China, if the world survives, next in line. Putin understands this, the whole world outside the West also does. He has acted circumspectly (as in his conversation with Pope Francis), refusing to descend into the labyrinth of pathological obsession with eradicating ideological and systemic differences among nations, in favor of a general tolerance predicated on security and respect for international law. Not so the US, especially with regard to Russia, having violated countless times, beginning with Woodrow Wilson and the Siberian Intervention, both elements of the latter's identity, sovereignty, and place in the world. Beginning with the Bolshevik Revolution, as in the period 1917-19, America has solemnly committed itself to destroying all traces of communism/socialism as representing the total menace to an American-defined presumed democratic world order, itself the legitimating agency for capitalism enjoying exclusive status as morally and politically acceptable. This is not something new, then, but a carefully wrought policy-framework of increasingly military proportions and barely veiled if at all hostility.

Little changed in the interwar period. Take, for example, the US recognition of Russia in 1933, thought today perhaps as a parting of the clouds and testifying to FDR's noblesse oblige, supreme confidence in America's greatness, and pragmatism, when in reality Russia was almost irrelevant, from the standpoint of political respect and ideological rapprochement, to the decision. Instead, two things: the business community openly salivated at the opportunity for market expansion—far less doctrinaire when it came to profits than the existing state of public opinion—in such a vast untapped area; perhaps more basic, the thought that Russia would be a counterweight to Japan, which was already making encroachments on China, particularly with respect to trade, offering obstacles to American expansion in its chosen (aka, god-given) economic venue and sphere of influence. Too, recognition had to do indirectly with larger dimensions of trade: the fear that Germany, Italy, and Japan were making inroads into Latin American markets (and their extraction of raw materials therein), Russia standing dimly as a useful ally or example of American Open Door ground rules and even surrogate for lost opportunities closer to home. In sum, Roosevelt was not giving anything away, so that recent scholarly attempts to show FDR and Stalin on the same page sharing common ground throughout the period including World War II are nonsense.

For the preponderance of scholarship, the historical narrative is now familiar: In the late 1930s, the rise of Hitler and Nazism left Russia largely unnoticed at first as a possible major player (reinforced by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which represented Russia's own desperate attempt to save itself from attack, given the relative indifference to its fate of Britain and the US). This changed only with the worsening of the war situation—the overrunning of Poland, the fall of France—when Russia came seriously into American and British war planning. And even then, Russia was taken for granted, for the crucial years 1941-43 given no mutual cooperation and agreement on the shape of the postwar world. As the war progressed and Russia suffered horrendous loss of life and vast

destruction of land, buildings, infrastructure, it was clear to Stalin that Roosevelt and Churchill were not aghast at the Nazi bloodletting (Hitler doing the job of anticommunism for them, or at least evidence of this view on Churchill's part), so that the paramount issue arising by 1943 for Stalin was the opening of a second front to relieve the pressure on Russia which bore the brunt of the Nazi attack.

FDR purposely delayed a decision, an unforgivable act in the circumstances. Worse followed, for with war's end there was still little common ground between FDR and Stalin, the latter vainly asking for economic aid for social reconstruction and, of grave significance, assurance of security via safe borders.

Hence the Cold War initially the product of fundamental differences over Russia's future, its weakened state only inciting the US to further obduracy. By 1944 the architecture of containment was already in place, and, following Roosevelt's death, was achieved by the Marshall Plan. So many issues were strewn around, e.g., the division of Germany, dropping the second atomic bomb on Japan primarily as warning to Russia not to expand eastward (rather than merely hasten the victory over the Japanese), above all, I think, the question of a security perimeter. More can be said, but this account forms the background for the present condition of mistrust between the two countries and sheds light on policy continuities of anticommunism which Obama inherited but also has extended, to the extent of making even the early Cold War unrecognizable today. No longer fishing in troubled waters, America is exercising a full-court press in Eastern Europe right up to the Russian border. Where is Putin in all of this? Before examining his recent press conference with an Italian paper on Russia's broader attitudes, I would like to suggest the more immediate setting for his and Russia's disappointment if not anger at the West, America in particular, for violating the terms of the 1997 accord between NATO and Russia on "Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security," signed in Paris (May 27, 1997).

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Some obvious provisions follow (enough to make one cry, so clear their betrayal on the US-NATO side of the ledger). Titled "Founding Act," it states that NATO and the Russian Federation, "based on an enduring political commitment undertaken at the highest political level, will build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security." This, as NATO presses eastward, announcing only this week that American-supplied military equipment would be placed near the Russian border in response to a putative Russian intent to swallow up all of Europe, the proximity of the material to the border in order to lessen the response time to the assault.

New York Times reporter Neil MacFarquhar's article, "Russia Urges U.S. Not to Deploy Weapons to Border Areas," (June 16), is indicative of the concern raised by this latest move, itself—as Putin has noted—obviously out of step with the Accord between NATO and Russia. MacFarquhar writes, "Moscow issued warnings on Monday [June 15] in response to the Pentagon's possible stationing of battle tanks and other heavy weapons to speed the deployment of American troops if needed in NATO states bordering Russia." The Foreign Ministry, fearing "herald[ing] the start of a competitive arms buildup," issued this statement: "We hope that reason will prevail and the situation in Europe will be prevented from sliding into a new military confrontation which may have dangerous consequences." The reporter's attempt at even-handedness: "What the West



considers renewed Russian aggression prompted the Pentagon to consider the move, but Moscow sees it as a longstanding pattern in which NATO forces creep closer to its borders.”

“Renewed Russian aggression” refers to Crimea and Ukraine, which, the plebiscite in one, the coup d’etat in the other, might well be viewed otherwise. Putin is said to have “had no immediate reaction,” while the Ministry said “the deployment would undermine a crucial provision of a 1997 agreement between Russia and NATO, in which the alliance pledged not to station substantial combat forces near Russia.” The coup alone invalidates the US-NATO action as defensive, especially in light of the alacrity within which Kiev fell in line with the alliance planning. MacFarquhar allows Washington to weasel out of the move with this fatuous distinction: “But the Pentagon maintains that it is merely deploying the equipment, not the troops themselves.”

Returning to the “Founding Act,” we find a miracle of public relations (surprisingly, Russia did not protest) about a relationship fraught from day one—or rather, implicit from the Siberian Intervention to the present— with conflict: “NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries. They share the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation.” This commitment “marks the beginning of a fundamentally new relationship between NATO and Russia. They intend to develop, on the basis of common interest, reciprocity and transparency a strong, stable and enduring partnership.” One that lasted less than a decade, if not cynically conceived from its inception. The Act speaks of “the goals and mechanism of consultation, cooperation, joint decision-making and joint action,” as meanwhile US-NATO increased militarization, contingency plans, further interventions including both US and NATO forces, and dead-ahead weapons’ production (yes, the Foreign Ministry’s feared arms race, which in fact never abated in America from the beginning of the Cold War, much of it defining a healthy export trade with the advantage of cementing new friends and allies) made a mockery of “consultation, cooperation,” etc.

No wonder Putin’s skepticism and dismissal of rhetoric concerning US-NATO intentions and actions, ample reason for the West’s demonization of him and of Russia for the refusal to knuckle under to superior force. That Putin does not hide his disdain for Obama only drives the latter more determinedly to show the flag, surrounding himself with Brennan-style war hawks, Biden-type sycophants, and the full panoply of repressive agencies, personnel, and practices, as in the domestic war against the American people via massive surveillance, the unleashing of elite paramilitary units adept at assassination acting in their name, and the general climate of approval of global-wide counterrevolution making super-patriots of us all. No, Putin was not the product of immaculate conception, but as his interview in *Il Corriere della Sera* attests, it is not he and Russia that represent a threat to world security. Why believe him? I can only plead two reasons: the consecutive history of US efforts at overturning the Russian government (now going on 100 years) despite the shamefulness and duplicity in treating with contempt Russia’s sacrifices during World War II, which relieved Hitler’s pressure on the Western front and probably saved England and possibly averted the invasion of the Western Hemisphere—a debt the beneficiaries have not paid, still less acknowledged; also, in tone, word choice, context, he appears cogent and believable, not slick, as in the case of America’s present leader. I may be naïve, but at least I want the reader to be introduced to the man in his own words, not as a substitute for the historical underpinning, but making sense of it.

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The paper's editor, Luciano Fontana, started off the questioning, addressed to Italian-Russian relations, in which he expressed concern that they have "been somewhat marred by the crisis in Ukraine and the sanctions," to which Putin, taking in the wider relations with the EU, replied: "First, I firmly believe that Russia was not responsible for the deterioration in relations between our country and the EU states. This was not our choice; it was dictated by our partners. It was not we who introduced restrictions on trade and economic activities." Nevertheless, as between Russia and Italy there has been an "eleven fold" increase in trade over the last two years and—one might forget Putin's socialist label for he sounds quite admiring of capitalist activity—[t]here are 400 Italian companies operating in Russia. We are cooperating actively in the energy sector, in an array of fields. Italy is the third largest consumer of our energy resources. We have many joint high technology projects, in the space and aircraft industries, and in many other sectors." 900,000 Russian tourists visited Italy last year, spending "over a billion euro." Why the unreasoning fear, therefore, the political-cultural lag from the past? I cannot answer that, except to indicate the evident irrationality—or perhaps resentment of competition.

When asked next by Fontana about which Italian prime minister he liked best, Putin cut to the chase—"personal trust," whomever the person "is certainly a very important factor in our work, in building relations on the interstate level." Not ideological similarity, but enjoying "trust-based relations in the political sphere," counts most; the visit of the Italian prime minister, Matteo Renzi, to that end, received widespread notice and approval. Putin seeks a cooperative attitude on the part of others, for which he is "ready to reciprocate" and go still further. He elaborates on the rejection of an ideological litmus test: "I have always sensed a truly sincere interest in building interstate relations irrespective of the domestic political situation. I would like to say in this regard that the attitude people in Russia have developed towards Italy does not depend on which political party is in power."

The other questioner, Paolo Valentino, noting Putin's coming attendance for Russian Day at Milan's Universal Exhibition, sought his response to "the core theme of this year's exhibition," namely, "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life," and specifically, "What is Russia's contribution to this cause?" Too, "What does this effort mean for relations between states?" Here I find the human, compassionate side, not generally credited, of Putin: "This is one of the major challenges that humanity is facing today. So I can and must acknowledge that the Italian organizers chose one of the key themes for the exhibition." He continued: The world population is rising, reaching "9 billion people by 2050," and presently, according to the UN, "850 million people all over the planet are under nourished or starving, and 100 million of them are children." This is central to an enlightened conception of world order: "Many other issues, seemingly unrelated, will depend on how we deal with it. I am talking about instability among other things, that is political instability of entire regions, terrorism, and so on. All these problems are interrelated." He speaks of the recent migration of peoples "that has hit Italy and Europe today" as "among these resulting problems." The context is enlightened, spacious, an orientation of which US policymakers are essentially clueless.

Russia's contribution of \$200M to UN programs complements the Russian effort to expand its agricultural sector, a growth rate of "3.4 3.5 percent" last year, holding steady in the first quarter of the current year, helping to make Russia "the third largest grain exporter in the world." Then Valentino switches to the perception that Russia "feels betrayed, abandoned by Europe," and fires

off a series of questions: “What are the problems in these relations today? Do you think that Europe has been too dependent on the United States in the Ukrainian crisis? What do you expect from Europe in relation to the sanctions?” We can close with Putin’s answers to these questions, insightful to begin with, although the interview did not end till two in the morning. I shall add sparingly a few choice quotes made at its conclusion.

When Valentino characterized Russia’s situation as being “like a lover abandoned by his mistress,” Putin was quick to say, “We have never viewed Europe as a mistress,” and here he begins a monologue in which an informal framework of political and economic relations specifying Russia’s relations to the rest of Europe is presented:

I am quite serious now. We have always proposed a serious relationship. But now I have the impression that Europe has actually been trying to establish material based relations with us, and solely for its own gain. [“material based” = exploitative, concerned only with advantage, and possibly keeping Russia in a dependent stage of political economy] There is the notorious Third Energy Package and the denial of access for our nuclear energy products to the European market despite all the existing agreements. There is reluctance to acknowledge the legitimacy of our actions and reluctance to cooperate with integration associations in the territory of the former Soviet Union. I am referring to the Customs Union, which we created and which has now grown into the Eurasian Economic Union.

This is hardly a mere rant, but the studied particularization on the part of Western financial-industrial interests and practices designed to cripple Russia preparatory to regime change or dismemberment, if not worse. Putin is rightfully wary—and sour: “Because it is all right when integration takes place in Europe, but if we do the same in the territory of the former Soviet Union, they try to explain it by Russia’s desire to restore an empire. I don’t understand the reasons for such an approach.” Then the visionary comes out, yet because Russia as author an unacceptable vision: “You see, all of us, including me, have been talking for a long time about the need to establish a common economic space stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In fact, French President Charles de Gaulle said something similar a lot earlier than me. Today nobody objects to it, everybody says: yes, we should aspire to this.” But, yes but. And but again. Putin is not de Gaulle; Russia is not France. Putin can taste the US-EU-NATO animus toward his country and himself.

Dismemberment via the manipulation of energy supplies is an important part of the Western strategy of containment. Hence, he continues: “But what is happening in practice? For example, the Baltic States have joined the European Union. Good, no problem. But today we are being told that these countries, which are part of the energy system of the former Soviet Union and Russia, they must join the European Union’s energy system. We ask: Are there any problems with energy supply or with something else? Why is it necessary?—No, there are no problems, but we have decided that it will be better this way.” A policy of economic strangulation appears operative, or simply putting Russia to large additional expense as a means of inflicting harm. Thus, “What does this mean for us in practical terms? It means that we will be forced to build additional generating capacities in some western regions in Russia. Since electricity transmission lines went through the Baltic States to some Russian regions and vice versa, all of them will now be switched over to Europe, and we will have to build new transmission lines in our country to ensure electricity supply. This will cost us about 2 2.5 billion euro.”

Now, still using energy as the focus, he turns to Ukraine, summing up with two penetrating questions:

Now let's look at the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. It does not require that Ukraine becomes part of the European energy system, but it is considered possible. If this happens, we will have to spend not 2 2.5 billion but, probably, about 8 10 billion euro for the same purpose. The question is: why is this necessary if we believe in building a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok? What is the objective of the European Union's Eastern Partnership? Is it to integrate the whole former Soviet Union into a single space with Europe, I repeat for the third time, from Lisbon to Vladivostok, or to cut something off and establish a new border between modern Russia and the western territories including, say, Ukraine and Moldova?

Putin then asks what no American leader, political or military, has the honesty or courage to ask: "What are the roots of the Ukrainian crisis? Its cause seems to be completely disproportionate to what has become an utter tragedy today claiming many lives in southeast Ukraine. What sparked the crisis?" Yanukovich, as president, is deposed in a coup d'état, despite wanting more time for discussion about signing the Association Agreement with the EU, rioters in Kiev being "actively supported both by our European and American partners," the coup, of course, "a totally anti-constitutional act." The new government would sign and Putin queries, "The question is: what was the coup d'état for? Why did they need to escalate the situation to a civil war?" He points out that in 2013 Russia was "ready to give Ukraine \$15 billion as a state loan supported by a further \$5 billion via commercial banks; plus we already gave it \$3 billion during the year and promised to cut gas prices by half if they paid regularly." Then to some the startling admission: "We were not against Ukraine signing an Association Agreement with the European Union," only that it fulfill its obligations to "the CIS free trade area." The remainder would take us far afield; suffice it to say, Ukraine received favorable treatment, the unilateral removal of customs duties from the EU, as one example, as it fulfilled the promise of bringing US-NATO forces into closer striking distance of Russia. After further details on the role of outside parties, he concludes, "So, I believe that this crisis was created deliberately and it is the result of our partner's [US] unprofessional actions. And the coverage of this process has been absolutely unacceptable. I would like to emphasise once more: this was not our choice, we did not seek it, we are simply forced to respond to what is happening."

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On the contrived—or perhaps even real—climate of fear engendered by America and its allies toward Russia, Putin observed: "As for some countries' concerns about Russia's possible actions, I think that only an insane person and only in a dream can imagine that Russia would suddenly attack NATO. [I quoted this in a recent CP article.] I think some countries are simply taking advantage of people's fears with regard to Russia." In further explanation: "They just want to play the role of front-line countries that should receive some supplementary military, economic, financial or some other aid. Therefore, it is pointless to support this idea; it is absolutely groundless. But some may be interested in fostering such fears. I can only make a conjecture."

I suggest Putin is right on target, especially here: "For example, the Americans do not want Russia's rapprochement with Europe. I am not asserting this, it is just a hypothesis. Let's suppose that the United States would like to maintain its leadership in the Atlantic community. [He underestimates the scope of America's hegemonic desires]. It needs an external threat, an external

enemy to ensure this leadership.” Clearly, not just anyone. For he states, “Iran is clearly not enough—this threat is not very scary or big enough. Who can be frightening? And then suddenly this crisis unfolds in Ukraine. Russia is forced to respond. Perhaps, it was engineered on purpose, I don’t know. But it was not our doing.” Alas, a statement totally foreign to the practiced repertoire of sustained anticommunism, in circulation since Wilson’s time and still with us: “Let me tell you something—there is no need to fear Russia. The world has changed so drastically that people with some common sense cannot even imagine such a large-scale military conflict today. We have other things to think about, I assure you.”

JUNE 22, 2015

### **Moral Critique of Capitalist Profligacy**

Pope Francis is the 21<sup>st</sup> century Marx, anatomizing the environment for the full exploitative dimensions of its domination by the structure and practices of global capitalism similar to Marx’s own 19<sup>th</sup> century dissection of commodity structure (foundations of alienation), exploitive core of property in defining the relations between capital and labor, and profit as the all-absorbing psychopathology of gain. A reading of his papal encyclical, *Laudato Si*, “Praise Be to You,” transposes the strong moral critique of capitalism, rendered as a statement of faith, and actually rooted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, onto the secular indictment of the very same institutional political-economic framework, corresponding to an earlier developmental stage, Marx examines—and excoriates—in *Das Capital*. Do I exaggerate the connection? For radicals who may be disposed to rejecting a belief in God (at times, my own conviction) it would be foolhardy to dismiss out of hand theory and argumentation resting on religion; rather, what is important is to search out the moral equivalences between the secular and religious criticisms of what turn out to be fundamental class relations. Again, Pope Francis-Karl Marx, no, not in every respect, but when it comes to the critical analysis of capitalism, from constructing monopolistic structures of domination to, directly from there, exploiting and creating the further human suffering of the poor, the two are on the same page, and if anything Francis takes up a specificity of industrial problems, as indeed global warming itself, not yet within Marx’s ken. Add, then, to superimposition, an updating of capitalist development.

First let me examine three articles from the New York Times on *Laudato Si* (credit where credit is due, for in these pages I have often criticized The Times for being wedded to the status quo, overly protective of corporations and US foreign policy), starting with Jim Yardley and Laurie Goodstein, “Pope Francis, in Sweeping Encyclical, Calls for Swift Action on Climate Change,” (June 18). Their opening is excellent, that Francis has “called for a radical transformation of politics, economics and individual lifestyles to confront environmental degradation and climate change, blending a biting critique of consumerism and irresponsible development with a plea for swift and unified global action.” They skirt around capitalism as causal, yet in stating the encyclical “is sweeping in ambition and scope,” their summary comes close: “He [Francis] describes relentless exploitation and destruction of the environment and says apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and political shortsightedness are to blame.” And they add, “The most vulnerable victims, he declares, are the world’s poorest people, who are being dislocated and disregarded.”

For Marx, false consciousness, for today's world, apathy, but for both historical contexts a willingness to tolerate capitalism in the name of technological advancement and economic growth (both of which the working classes in the respective periods, less so in Marx's, have given it a free pass) than it deserves. By viewing the environment as generic code for that which supports LIFE in all its forms, he deepens the indictment beyond the politics of climate change to the wholesale repudiation of all political-economic-institutional modes of domination, whose purpose is systemic, class-based wealth accumulation directly at the expense, and to the perpetuation, of the poor, a condition which defines the dichotomy between countries of the North and South (a point Francis explicitly makes), entails environmental degradation not least through the privileged (aka economically forcible) extraction of natural resources, and makes of domination an acceptable good of political economy.

But not of moral economy, and what Francis proposes is the fusion of moral and political economy as the means of eviscerating the latter's exploitative purpose and features. Francis is not a retrogressive character out of the past; technology squeezes the human being into a commodity, strips forests for purposes of agricultural and other modes of development, renders development per se into a curse for working people and the poor, because organized for profit, not servicing human needs. Thus, political economy without its moral dimension liberates the savagery of wealth and probably equally base instincts which, given the greed and fratricidal struggle for control of the capital-accumulation process, almost inevitably leads to war. Laudato Si has as much to say about seeking the welfare of humankind as seeking oneness with God, and for Francis the two are inextricably tied. For the nonbeliever, even the first part, leaving God out of the picture, is the noblest pursuit one can imagine, and the beauty of the encyclical is that he continually uses the phrase "all of us," we, humankind, not just some, face the consequences of environmental destruction.

The reporters put Francis into historical perspective, reminding us of a tradition near-erased from our collective consciousness through the suffusion of capitalist ideology in America: "Catholic theologians say the overarching theme of the encyclical is 'integral ecology,' which links care for the environment with a notion already well developed in Catholic teaching: that economic development, to be morally good and just, must take into account people's need for things like freedom, education and meaningful work." The concept, integral ecology, refers to more than the environment, methods of conservation, sensible consumption, for what is at stake is the complexion of the moral universe as it applies to "all of us," for, here, one can leave God out of the equation, but one cannot leave out freedom, education, meaningful work—and the eradication of poverty, which is Francis's first priority. Vincent Miller, chair in Catholic theology and culture at the University of Dayton, is quoted by the reporters in a particularly apt explanation of the general point: "The basic idea is, in order to love God, you have to love your fellow human beings, and you have to love and care for the rest of creation. It gives Francis a very traditional basis to argue for the inclusion of environmental concern at the center of the Christian faith."

What I find exciting here is that Francis treats as a false dichotomy the relation between faith and science, or, if I may step away from the narrowly theological, between moral principle and science. (As Marcuse once noted, in explicating the writings of Lord Acton, science divorced from and not informed by a moral sensibility becomes an amoral framework applicable to the policies of dominant groups, in which empty/neutral social values can be used to justify oppression.) The

encyclical forces attention to the way science denies responsibility for its uses. The reporters quote Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, who finds himself wrestling with this problem of reconciliation: “Within the scientific community, there is almost a code of honor that you will never transgress the red line between pure analysis and moral issues. But we are now in a situation where we have to think about the consequences of our insight for society.” Scientists may not, but politicians surely will, fall back on the notion or doctrine of abstract science wherein nothing must be allowed to intrude. In practice, an iron wall is erected, so that—as already is sounded in America—the moral factor in climate-control policy is viewed as anticapitalist and therefore anti-American. Francis: “Our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.”

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My New York Times Comment on the Yardley-Goodstein article, same date, follows:

With “Laudato Si,” Pope Francis has become the voice of conscience for ALL of humankind, and I await the leaders of the other world religions to join forces with him. This will not happen, however, because world politics is about imperialism, development via capitalist aggrandizement, and forcible dominion, with supportive roles played by too many religious leaders.

This encyclical is a clarion call to sanity, human decency, and the putting into practice of the meaningful worship of God—and for nonbelievers, living a moral life with respect to peace, social justice, and other aspects of the same meaningful worship. Spoliation is immoral, just as exploitation is. Those who seek to marginalize Francis by building an artificial wall between politics and morality had best begin to come to terms with their conscience for mounting apologia to inequality, privation, human suffering, all in the name of progress.

This encyclical will go down hard in the US, where already lame rationales are used, by conservative Catholics and all who are in denial about climate change, to evade moral responsibility for the welfare, not only of humankind, but every phase of life, including Nature, plants, animals, down to the subatomic level. Francis is calling our bluff. We are destroyers, not propagators, haters, not lovers, fast losing the right to claim human dignity. He has laid down the challenge: the affirmation of life itself.

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Coral Davenport’s article, “Championing Environment, Francis Takes Aim at Global Capitalism,” (June 18), is surprising for The Times, when she writes, the encyclical “is as much an indictment of the global economic order as it is an argument for the world to confront climate change,” a shrewd assessment although the two go together. She zeros in on the main points: “It offers blistering criticism of 21<sup>st</sup>-century capitalism, expressing skepticism about market forces, criticizing consumerism and cautioning about the [societal] costs of growth.” In fact one reason, apropos of our previous discussion, for so many demanding that Francis stick to morals and not meddle in politics, is the standard raised that market fundamentalism is pure science and hence exempt from moral inquiry. The debate already in progress is essentially, rally around the dollar and preserve development, including the globalization of mega-multinationals, rather than rock the boat through extraneous matters. The grounds of dismissal-denial are perfectly predictable.

Environmental economists appear in the foreground of this snow-job, championing the trading of carbon-emission credits as the solution to global warming, which, Davenport notes, Francis in the encyclical condemns, “saying it merely creates new forms of speculation and does not bring about ‘radical change.’” And yet, with the UN meeting in Paris in December to reach an accord, “carbon trading is the policy most widely adopted by governments to combat climate change, and it has been endorsed by leading economists as a way to cut carbon pollution while sustaining economic growth.” And why not, since “economic growth,” as defined by the industrial powers, is sacrosanct, and cap-and-trade the holy grail of energy policy. Francis explicitly has called in the encyclical for the wealthy nations to shoulder the burden of cutting emissions, a major reason that nothing has been accomplished. In a nutshell Davenport notes, “In particular, environmental economists criticized the encyclical’s condemnation of carbon trading, seeing it as part of a radical critique of market economies.”

Like defense intellectuals populating our think tanks, environmental economists are the Swiss Guard—or better, shock troops—mounting the barricades in defense of monopoly capital. And Harvard, where I received my doctorate ages go, seems a haven for both today. Take Robert N. Stavins, director of its environmental economics department; he says in an email to the reporter: “I respect what the pope says about the need for action, but this is out of step with the thinking and the work of informed policy analysts around the world, who recognize that we can do more, faster, and better with the use of market-based policy instruments—carbon taxes and/or cap-and-trade systems.” Ah, those “policy analysts,” so bright, humane, selfless. Stavins then dismisses Francis because he came from the developing world, Argentina, horror of horrors, thus reflecting the views of a “small set of socialist Latin American countries that are opposed to the world economic order, fearful of free markets, and have been utterly dismissive and uncooperative in the international climate negotiations.” For his ilk, and they are legion, the foregoing becomes the ultimate put-down.

If I have not said it, God must share His/Her godhead with the Market as the essence of divinity. And when the two are seen as one, it’s time to run for cover! Davenport points out that critics of global warming may be playing into the hands of the apologists: “the encyclical’s criticism of market forces, and its references to sacrificing economic growth to protect the environment, could have the unintended consequence of strengthening the arguments of opponents of climate change policy.” God-ordained profit, dragoon the poor, give whatever expression to degradation possible, but don’t mess with the free market. Francis isn’t buying, and in the US we can expect from tactful to head-on vilification, perhaps especially because, as the reporter observes, “A true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.”

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Finally, Goodstein’s article, “In the Footsteps of Popes Seeking Worldly Change,” (June 18), is important in placing *Laudato Si* into theological context, thus undermining Francis’s critics who insinuate his communist leanings or ignore his historical roots in Catholic social teachings. Key here is Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor), 1891, which sets forth the workers’ right to organize—while also accepting private ownership of property. This is the basis for these teachings, to be followed by Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* (1963) on the danger of



nuclear annihilation, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) on the obligation of wealthy nations to help the poor ones, and Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) on the economic inequality created by globalization. In another shrewd assessment, this time, by Austen Ivereigh, a papal biographer, we find Francis jumping back to Leo in terms of significance (the intervening encyclicals not receiving the attention or controversy, however much deserved, now obtaining), because *Laudato Si*, going beyond earlier church documents referring to an environmental crisis, "is intended to provoke action—to cause an enormous 'conversion' in how humans understand their place and responsibility to a planet that is in peril."

Goodstein grasps the meat of Francis's ideas in the encyclical: "[He] puts forward a profoundly theological document, grounded in Catholic teaching, but one in which spiritual and secular matters are knit so closely together that the table of contents promising to segregate them into sections is a bit deceptive." And she picks out what for me was a sublime theme: "Throughout the paper, like a recurring chant, Francis intones that everyone and everything is interconnected—to God, to creation, to fellow human beings." That is what makes *Laudato Si* so beautiful to me, and so radical. At rock-bottom Marx would have been moved by interconnection as the fabric and substance of reality, and why Francis could and does connect environmental degradation to the institutions, values, and practices of capitalism. Not coincidentally, she points out, *Laudato Si* is named for St. Francis of Assisi's canticle, in which Francis's own recurring invocation of "brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth," derives from the earlier one.

Let this be the encyclical's message, as summarized by the reporter: "He [Francis] attributes the environmental crisis to wealthier, industrialized countries that extract resources to feed an insatiable desire for consumer goods. Christians also, he said, have been seduced by this consumerism, despite the tradition of monasticism and teachings on simplicity by St. Francis and others." Present-day Francis puts it this way: "Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that 'less is more.'" No wonder Francis is feared as dysfunctional to the political economy and, equally, the very culture, of monopoly capitalism.

JUNE 24, 2015

### **Israel's Ravagement of Gaza**

Gaza 2014, a scene of unsurpassed brutality indicting Israel as a war-criminal nation nonpareil, though here, in the Report, pursuant to HRC resolution S-21/S, this is only hinted at despite the overwhelming evidence presented of systematic destruction, wanton murder of civilians, indiscriminate policies aimed at terrorizing a whole people into submission. Yes, Palestinians, too, come in for criticism—the tunnels, mortar firings, border raids—in a tactful show of impartiality, but the actuality of a disproportion in the conduct of operations in which the Israeli Defense Forces were merciless in acting out a scorched-earth militaristic paradigm (far beyond anything Hamas could even have tried, if in fact it were so inclined) is enough of an indelible moral stain as to warrant Israel's increasingly pariah status in world opinion. The accommodative—indeed, celebratory—response of global Jewry to Israel's behavior transmogrifies the very identity and

historical significance of a religion whose tradition aligned it with radicalism, humane learning and practice, labor rights, respect for all humankind (including in America, as a fading memory now, fighting in the trenches in civil rights and antiwar activity).

The Report is unusually comprehensive, one reason Israel (which did not allow the Commission into its country or the Occupied Territories, illustrating its contempt for the UN virtually since day one) jumped the gun and published a response before the Report was issued. Cocksure, Israel answers to no-one and acts accordingly. Hence, pummeling with impunity a largely helpless populace, rendered still weaker by an encompassing blockade. Given Israel's refusal to let the Commission into Gaza, we will never know the full cost of the destruction, especially from interviews and the taking of personal testimony. Yet a surprising amount of information has nevertheless come out, including that from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), various UN agencies (as when their schools, crowded with Palestinians seeking refuge, were deliberately targeted), and NGOs on the ground.

In stating the legal framework, i.e., accountability of the parties, according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, the Report outlines three principles, violation of which should be presumptive evidence of war crimes (the Report reticent to a fault, does not make the judgment), in each case of which we see why Israel is so uncooperative—to the point of having precious few internal proceedings leading to conviction, and even then, not above the foot-soldiers' level, for such crimes. The principles are plainly put:

“Firstly, the principle of distinction requires that parties to a conflict distinguish between civilians and civilian objects on one hand and combatants and military objectives on the other. Attacks may only be directed against the latter. Secondly, the principle of proportionality prohibits attacks that are expected to cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. Thirdly, the principle of precautions in attack requires all parties to take all feasible measures to avoid and in any event to minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.”

Distinction, proportionality, precautions: let's get right down to it. Figures don't lie; exact numbers since derived from different sources may be a bit off, but the disproportion is self-evident. Thus the Report states: In Gaza “the scale of devastation was unprecedented. The death toll alone speaks volumes: 2,251 Palestinians were killed, including 1,462 Palestinian civilians, of whom 299 women and 551 children, and 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, were injured, of whom 10 per cent suffered permanent disability as a result.” In contrast, “the death of six civilians in Israel and 67 soldiers and the injury of up to 1,600 others were also the tragic result of the hostilities.” Israel pointed to rockets and mortars “amounting to almost \$25 million” in damages and psychological damage to its citizens because of the existence of the tunnels. The context is rather harsher in Gaza: “In Gaza, as Palestinians struggled to find ways to save their own lives and those of their families, they were confronted with intense attacks, with no way of knowing which locations would be hit and which might be considered safe. People began to move from one place to another, only to encounter attacks in the new neighborhood, and they would have to move on. Closed into the [Gaza] Strip, with no possibility to exit, at times, 44 per cent of Gaza was either a no-go area or the object of evacuation warnings. These terrifying circumstances created a sense of entrapment, of having ‘no safe place’ to go.” Disproportion?

Israelis could whine, as they meanwhile pulverized the Gazans, because to them a Palestinian life was of little value; the death of an IDF soldier would result in massive killings, often sadistic in the pain inflicted. The Report goes on: “Alongside the toll on civilian lives, there was enormous destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza: 18,000 housing units were destroyed in whole or in part, much of the electricity network and of the water and sanitation infrastructure were incapacitated, and 73 medical facilities and many ambulances were damaged.” Not in the Report (a serious omission) is the deliberateness of these attacks, requiring pinpoint accuracy, and we learned at the time that hospitals were overcrowded, the injured filling hallways, those on operating tables—when the electricity went out—made to suffer and die. The water-treatment plants were a favorite target as well.

The report continues: “Many Palestinians were uprooted from their homes or temporary shelters multiple times; at the height of the hostilities, the number of internally displaced persons reached 500,000, or 28 per cent of the population. The effects of this devastation had a severe impact on the human rights of Palestinians in Gaza and will do so for generations to come.” “The West Bank,” it adds, “including East Jerusalem, witnessed a period of heightened tensions and widespread human rights violations, including the fundamental right to life,” but largely unnoticed given the events in Gaza. Too, the hostilities in Gaza “cannot be assessed separately from the blockade imposed by Israel.” The further one probes the more one-sided the contest, although the Report refrains from such comments, at least in so many words: “The blockade and the military operation have led to a protection crisis and chronic, widespread and systematic violations of human rights, first and foremost the rights to life and security, but also to health, housing, education and many others.” The “protection crisis,” I surmise, refers to the failure of Israel to protect these rights “in accordance with international human rights law,” i.e., Israel’s obligation, as in the case of any occupying power, to “take concrete steps towards their full realization.”

Children on both sides “were savagely affected by the events”; however, the Gazan case seems worse off. The UN Children’s Fund reveals that in Gaza “more than 1,500 children were orphaned.” Next, the Report “focuses on areas that reflect new patterns, notably attacks by Israel on residential buildings resulting in the death of entire families; Israel’s ground operations, which leveled urban neighborhoods; and violations by Palestinian armed groups and authorities in Gaza, including their reliance on attack tunnels.” “New patterns,” the old being sufficiently disheartening as not to be worthy of comment: “Other incidents—namely attacks by Israel on United Nations shelters, medical facilities, ambulances, and other critical infrastructure—are considered less thoroughly, because these patterns have been a recurring reality in this and prior conflicts.” Wow, what a record: same old, same old stunning violations of human rights. Meanwhile, as for Palestinians, there were several mortar hits on kibbutzim. IDF also discovered “32 tunnels, 14 of which extended beyond the Green Line into Israel.” I do not apologize for Palestinian actions; children were killed, rockets promiscuously fired (unlike the Israelis, no guidance systems), but again the disproportion, as when the Report notes: “During the 51-day operation, the Israel Defense Forces carried out more than 6,000 airstrikes in Gaza, many of which hit residential buildings.” The details are grisly (no compassion, apologies, only more unrelenting attacks expressed by Israel), as here: “...at least 142 Palestinian families had three or more members killed in the same incident, amounting to a total of 742 fatalities.” Tawfik Abu Jama, a Gazan father of eight, recalled: “I was sitting with my family at the table, ready to break the fast. Suddenly we were sucked into the ground. Later that evening, I woke up in the hospital and was told my wife and children had died.”

Israel denounces the Report before its release and brazenly prides itself on the commission of mass civilian deaths (one recalls the citizens of Siderot sitting on the hillside cheering the explosions as they struck Gaza, munchies in hand, couches dragged out for comfort—a searing image of moral depravity). Airstrikes, just the thing to measure national virility: “The commission investigated 15 cases of strikes on residential buildings across Gaza, in which a total of 216 people were killed, including 115 children and 50 women.” The Commission found that in all cases “precision-guided weapons were used,” a finding “corroborated by satellite imagery analysis,” and “many of the incidents took place in the evening or at dawn, when families gathered for iftar and suhkur, the Ramadan meals, or at night, when people were asleep.” The Report states the obvious: “The timing of the attacks increased the likelihood that many people, often entire families, would be at home. Attacking residential buildings rendered women particularly vulnerable to death and injury.” Even the Report has to recur to one of its principles: “With regard to proportionality, given the circumstances, a reasonable commander would have been aware that these attacks would be likely to result in a large number of civilian casualties and the complete or partial destruction of the building.” Why else the attack?

One point emphasized is that knowing the damage inflicted and loss of life by the airstrikes, why did not these attacks come under closer scrutiny, questioned, halted? The Report continues: “Furthermore, the large number of targeted attacks against residential buildings and the fact that such attacks continued throughout the operation, even after the dire impact of these attacks on civilians and civilian objects became apparent, raise concern that the strikes may have constituted military tactics reflective of a broader policy, approved at least tacitly by decision-makers at the highest levels of the Government of Israel.” It’s about time the Report stepped outside its comfort zone of caution: residential airstrikes as military policy sanctioned at the highest levels.

Ground operations were equally murderous, especially in Shuja’iya; in the three neighborhoods studied a pattern was seen, “large areas of which were leveled to the ground.” I’m sorry, I haven’t the heart for the coverage of more atrocities, this section speaking, as the boldface heading makes clear, of “Use of artillery and other explosive weapons in densely populated areas.” There is in fact much more (the Report should be required reading, I devoutly wish, for all Israelis, not that I think it will change minds), but let me close with the testimony of Talel Al Helo from Shuja’iya: “I am not a fighter, I am a civilian and I care about the well-being of my family. The attacks were everywhere. Everything was coming under attack, the roads and the buildings; there was no safe haven in Shuja’iya. We walked as the missiles kept arriving. We saw bodies of people in the streets. We came across the body of an acquaintance and several other bodies, of young and old people, women and children.”

Today (June 22) Jodi Rudoren’s article in the New York Times, “U.N. Report on Gaza Finds Evidence of War Crimes by Israel and by Palestinian Militants,” appeared, its title—and contents—suggesting equal culpability and destruction. This blatant distortion of the Report and the underlying reality of the Gaza attack prompted my critical detailed Comment in The Times, which was published as number five and then subsequently removed. I protested in an email to the public editor, likely to no avail. So much for NYT’s devotion to honest journalism.

JUNE 26, 2015

## **The Baltic Assault Paradigm**

US-EU-NATO, inseparable, cohesive, in its anti-Russian military policies, which include a new round of economic sanctions and concerted demonization of Putin, has focused its war planning on the Baltic nations—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia—as a staging area for presumed eventual war, presumed, because as the evidence daily mounts, war with Russia increasingly defines the mindset of political and military leaders throughout the Grand Alliance. Brussels is now the adjunct of Washington, a unified global war capital. Washington orders, NATO delivers, itself hardly an autonomous force, its activities largely guided by the US as an extension of American foreign policy. Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers's New York Times article, "NATO Returns Its Attention to an Old Foe, Russia" (June 23), stacks the deck through its heading even before it begins. No, NATO never lost sight of Russia, whether as the Soviet Union or now, and indeed the ingrained insistence of policymakers, shared by the reporters, of strict continuity between the two, has justified the unabated Cold War. Stalin/Putin, a voracious appetite to swallow the West, and why not America as well? But "Returns Its Attention" is also a dead giveaway about NATO's wider role, that of supplementing American power whenever requested in US interventions in far-flung areas—yet without, for the US and NATO alike—taking their eye off the ball, Russia always kept in mind, as with Afghanistan. If NATO represents the militarization of the EU, it still more represents a stalking horse for American global hegemony.

The NYT article precisely because of its bias is a treasure trove of information (boastfully presented) of the stirrings of confrontation. The war fever in the Baltics, transmitted from Brussels and Washington, I put at 103.6 to indicate serious temperature of the patient already, but, for lack of remedies, bound to go up further. Schmitt and Myers are equal to the task, summoning a gargantuan danger: "After years of facing threats beyond its borders, NATO is now reinvigorating plans to confront a much larger and more aggressive threat from its past: Moscow." They continue: "This seismic shift [as though NATO in fact had been indifferent to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union—utter nonsense] has been apparent in military training exercises in this former Soviet republic [Schmitt writing from Camp Adazi, Latvia], which is now a NATO member and on the alliance's eastern flank, bordering Russia." That these military exercises are occurring near the Russian border appears matter-of-fact, not troubling or provocative.

And what exercises! The usual: "On a recent day, Latvian soldiers conducted a simulated attack on dug-in enemy positions in a pine forest here as two United States A-10 attack planes roared overhead and opened fire with 30-millimeter cannons." But then the highly unusual, the introduction of the B-52 into the training preparations, among America's most feared (its reputation more than earned) weapons in its arsenal: "Two days before, a B-52 dropped nine dummy bombs radioed in by the Latvians on the ground—all just 180 miles from the Russian border." Here the reporters are awe-struck yet uncritical: "The symbolism of the B-52s, stalwarts of the Cold War arsenal, was lost on no one. The bombers' main mission once was to deliver a nuclear knockout punch to Soviet forces, but they were put to use for the first time over this former Soviet republic to show resolve on the new front between NATO and Russia, the heir of the Soviet war machine." 180 miles from the Russian border.

Words are important, not because of NYT reporters, but because they so faithfully mirror the words and thoughts of political and military leaders, particularly in the US and the alliance as a

whole, The Times merely serving as the mouthpiece (aka, authoritative voice) of the US government. “To show resolve” is to anticipate an attack (perhaps the projection onto others of one’s own plans), while “the new front” is to anticipate actual confrontation, and “heir of the Soviet war machine” directly explicates the aforementioned continuity between the Soviet Union and Russia, Stalin and Putin. Here is Estonia’s chief of defense, Lt. Gen. Riho Terras, “who recently mobilized 13,000 soldiers across his tiny country in a separate exercise”: “If the Russians sense a window of opportunity, they will use it to their advantage. We must make sure there’s no room for miscalculation.” In other words, stand firm, show resolve. The state of preparation augers poorly for a cessation of hostility: “The military drills that unfolded here, part of a series of exercises planned over coming months to demonstrate the alliance’s readiness to confront Russia, emphasize the depth of the challenge facing an alliance that for a quarter of a century turned its attention to threats much further afield.”

The feigned innocence of the statement: “for a quarter of a century” NATO’s thoughts and involvement were elsewhere (the reporters do not realize the damning indictment, a globalized interventionist force), innocence, in that turning toward Russia was only recent—due to Russian conduct—and thus a necessity to ward off aggression (readiness, strength, no room for miscalculation). As for NATO, all is sweetness and light, “conducting expeditionary missions beyond NATO’s borders, from the Balkans to Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa,” Russia nowhere in sight, and now military spending had to be beefed up and “the alliance has had to reinvigorate plans that commanders and political leaders had largely consigned to the past.” No longer. “This week,” the article continues, “Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter [who begins to make Donald Rumsfeld seem like Mahatma Gandhi] travels through several NATO capitals before sitting down on Wednesday and Thursday [June 24-25] with other defense ministers in Brussels to debate how to counter a resurgent Russia.” Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s secretary general, with Crimea and Ukraine as proof of the resurgent Russia (in each case I note meriting further debate), states the result has been “the biggest reinforcement of NATO forces since the end of the Cold War.”

The Cold War never ended, but we get the picture: an increasing build-up and repositioning of heavy equipment on the Russian border. In addition to “a marked increase in training rotations on territory” in the Baltic countries, NATO announced last February “that it would set up six new command units within the Eastern allies and create a 5,000-strong rapid reaction ‘spearhead’ force.” The repositioning more recently (which I wrote about in CounterPunch) includes “heavy American tanks and other weaponry,” and, in the offing, when NATO leaders gather in Warsaw for a summit meeting in 2016, consideration of “other measures...needed to adjust its forces, to increase spending that had plummeted as part of a ‘peace dividend,’ and to revisit NATO’s military strategy and planning.” The so-called peace dividend did not appear in US military expenditures, and as for Warsaw, the agenda strongly suggests the meeting is for purposes of mobilizing aggression. One of my favorite sources, Julianne Smith, formerly at Defense and the White House, and now at the Center for a New American Security, expresses the current mood: “During the Cold War we had everything there in the neighborhood we needed to respond. It’s all atrophied. We haven’t gone through the muscle movements of a conventional attack in Europe for decades.” Presumably we should now to keep the Strangelovian juices flowing, or in any case, maintain a strong military posture which cannot but help to intensify the vigor of confrontation and war feeling.

James Stavridis, whom I quoted in a previous article, retired admiral and NATO military commander, now dean at the Fletcher School, glibly joined the chorus: “I don’t think we’re in the Cold War again—yet. I can kind of see it from here.” Michael Fallon, Britain’s defense secretary, stated last February that Russia’s attempt to destabilize the Baltic countries was a “real and present danger,” a view the reporters observe that will be presented at the NATO meeting in Brussels—and frankly they add: “But the potential for such an attack has implicitly been the focus of much of the training and planning going on in places like this [Adazi, Latvia].” I say “frankly,” because the training and planning has an offensive as well as defensive character. B-52s were not intended for sightseeing. Let’s hear now from Tomasz Siemoniak, Poland’s defense minister, who, claiming that NATO required a “strategic adaptation” in that Russia’s hostility to NATO was “a change in climate and not a summer storm,” wants “significant deployments of heavy weapons in Eastern Europe,” whatever Russia might think. Speaking to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in May, Siemoniak said: “I think the caution expressed by some of our European allies is excessive.” Birds of a feather—Warsaw and Washington! One is made to feel that peace is an ignominious condition of humankind.

An undercurrent of lamentation among defense intellectuals because NATO is not more powerful can be seen in the views of David Ochmanek, “a former senior Pentagon official” now at the Rand Corporation. His concern is activating spirit as well as appropriations both having declined with the fall of the Soviet Union. NATO members must “maintain military spending at 2 percent of gross domestic product, a level considered minimal for effective defense.” We have dropped our guard; but “Putin has changed that.” NATO allies have not wanted to increase military spending: “Nobody in any military establishment is looking for more bills to pay right now.” Sorry Ochmanek and the people at Rand; but I think your luck is changing. Depend on the alliance for making clear its intentions: “While American officials say that exercises like the one at this former Soviet tank base are mainly to allow NATO and Baltic states to hone their training together, they are also intended to send a strong message of solidarity.” Thus, “More than 6,000 troops from 14 allied nations...conducted the annual Saber Strike training exercise in the Baltics and Poland that ended Friday [June 19].”

Describing one exercise, “both sides trad[ing] simulated artillery and rocket fire,” A-10 attack planes roaring overhead, Schmitt and Myers write, “what really snapped back the necks of Baltic and other European observers was the B-52 bomber, on call for any additional strikes.” The B-52 is the symbol for steeling the conviction of rightness against the foe: Lt. Gen. Raimonds Graube, Latvia’s defense minister, “looked up admiringly at the warplanes, and dismissed any suggestion that a NATO exercise with B-52s might provoke the Russians,” instead saying: “Our soldiers must be ready to train on an international level,” a somewhat ominous phrase. Estonia to the ready has created a “defense league” of 30,000 civilians who “engage in basic infantry training once a month, receive arms from the government, and in the event of an invasion would be called to active duty to be commanded by professional soldiers,” this beyond the regular forces and hinting at the prevailing state of mind. Michael McFaul, former American ambassador to Russia, to whom I give the last word, differs from the rest only in expecting a drawn-out conflict: “There’s a hope this is all a bump in the road and with a little bit of tweaking we can get back to the status quo [itself hardly a desirable state]. In my view, that’s naïve. Putin’s not going to change his position, and he’s not going away. You’ve got to be in this for the long haul.”

Temperature 103.6 and rising.

JUNE 30, 2015

### **Banality of Anti-Russian Criticism**

Roger Cohen alone is not worth commentary or taking up the CP reader's time, but as, more than a straw in the wind, an exemplary statement of the US foreign-policy position and even more America's ideological center of gravity, coming down in both cases to global political-economic dominance on behalf of its system of advanced capitalism, he suits perfectly, as in his New York Times op-ed article, "Counterrevolutionary Russia," (June 26). The Cold War has perhaps never been so seriously considered as realizable confrontation before now, the US positioning the EU via NATO to the Russian border while simultaneously seeking a cordon sanitaire around China looking to its isolation and dismemberment. (Even the Cuban Missile Crisis, if not child's play, didn't quite have, though melodramatic, the potential for global destruction found now in the admittedly more sotto voce onrush of events.) Cohen and The Times, good foot-soldiers in the cause of American imperialism, accordingly seek distractions as here to divert attention from the underlying dynamics of a rapidly bifurcating world.

He first mischaracterizes Russia's global historical role, as though Stalin's idea of socialism in one country was not operative, subsequent post-1945 expansion having to do with experiencing Nazi policies of extermination, a resultant horrendous loss of life and physical destruction growing out of World War II, and the necessity for security of Russian borders (now felt once again given US-EU-NATO expansion and prepositioning of troops and heavy weaponry on its borders), and for the present century, contriving a contrast, the opposite of expansion being an insularity and backwardness: "For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia was a revolutionary state whose objective was the global spread of communist ideology. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it has become the preeminent counterrevolutionary power." Immediately the analysis slips away from the raw meat of power politics, intervention, conquest of and expansion of markets, to the vague realm of what now is familiarly termed the culture wars—Russia and Putin incensed by same-sex marriage, etc. Thus, Cohen writes: "The escalating conflict between the West and Moscow has been portrayed as political, military and economic. It is in fact deeper than that. It is cultural. President Vladimir Putin has set himself up as the guardian of an absolutist culture against what Russia sees as the predatory and relativist culture of the West."

Nothing like a black-and-white analysis, Russia's absolutism and the West's (sarcastically put) predatory and relativist culture—predatory (Cohen's praise of capitalism as coequal with democracy and freedom as the article proceeds, making the charge tongue-in-cheek) and relativist (doesn't he wish, for all that falls under exceptionalism takes on an absolutist quality), as meanwhile there is no attempt made to show Russian absolutism. In fact, no evidence is presented about Putin's views and that of unnamed intellectuals, rendering the dichotomy suspect from the start. Better yet, the cultural diversion makes political correctness the substance driving the world system toward war. Forget about massive military expenditures, a global network of military bases, political leaders who demonize Putin and Russia as well as Li and China, for what is determinative is our adversaries' hostility to rights which may be worthy in and of themselves (the list follows) but, to me, hardly rank with issues of war and peace, class privilege, labor and racial exploitation,



food on the table, and if you pressed me, capitalism and the phenomena of alienation and surplus value, all of which are relevant to the shoring up of discriminatory social systems.

Hence, Cohen: “To listen to pro-Putin Russian intellectuals these days is to be subjected to a litany of complaints about the ‘revolutionary’ West, with its irreligious embrace of same-sex marriage, radical feminism, euthanasia, homosexuality and other manifestations of ‘decadence.’ It is to be told that the West loses no opportunity to globalize these ‘subversive’ values, often under cover of democracy promotion and human rights.” And I thought globalization had other things to be concerned about, still under cover of democracy promotion, whether Morgan, Chase or Monsanto, or overthrowing popular leaders, or simply arranging for joint-maneuvers with our friends and allies, all to the furtherance of US wealth and power. There is a Cold War. It is turning hot. It has nothing to do with radical feminism, euthanasia, and homosexuality. Yet Cohen cannot let go, his listing presumably disarming the reader so that Putin is boxed in as a phobic animal: “Putin’s Russia, by contrast, is portrayed in these accounts [still unnamed] as a proud bulwark against the West’s abandonment of religious values, a nation increasingly devout in its observance of Orthodox Christianity, a country convinced that no civilization ever survived by ‘relativizing’ sacred truths.”

Here we tap the American mindset, Cohen as Everyman, or at least archetypal member of the think tank cadre, Pentagon officialdom, and Executive up to and including POTUS. No, they do not go to the mat for cultural freedoms; hostility toward Russia and China are made of fears, memories, self-righteousness and hubris. We are asked to believe in the historical-structural-ideological continuity of Russia from the Revolution to the present, even knowing significant capitalistic features have developed over time, with still the residue of suspicion and mistrust that communism lurks in the bushes—a hatred (not too strong a term) having so much psychological investment to support it that we cannot let it die. Where would be the huge arms budget, on which Americans’ sense of security and identity depends, and the boost to economic growth and avoidance of depression, if such feeling/hysteria were not persistently cultivated? Yet to make the case for absolutistic religion, and with it cultural retrogradation, discontinuity has to be posited. Then, to confuse matters still more, the portrayal of religious dedication (what happened to godless Communism?) might well be appealing to many Americans, lessening tension and antipathy if the word got out. My point: forcing a contrast within Russian history as a means of politicizing conflict between the US and Russia, whilst still maintaining the continuity within Russia for the same purpose, is not a winning argument.

Perhaps absolutism is meant to be the not-so-hidden thread tying communism to counterrevolution, the continuity as discontinuity. Gratuitously, Cohen casts Crimea and Ukraine in a one-sided light, ignoring claims of Russia on the former, the US sponsored takeover (with enough fascist elements to go around) of the latter. The intended black eye, because said in passing, introduces the principal source of conflict: “Beyond Putin’s annexation of Crimea and stirring-up of a small war in eastern Ukraine (although large enough to leave more than 6,000 dead), it is the decision to adopt cultural defiance of the West that suggests the confrontation with Russia will last decades. [Cultural defiance becomes pivotal, in this case lengthening a conflict already assumed on other grounds.] Communism was a global ideology; Putinism is less than that. But a war of ideas has begun in which counterrevolution against the godless and insinuating West is a cornerstone of Russian ideology.”

That hidden thread, Communism to Putinism, predicates a common lust for power, punctuated by a presumed halcyon period dividing the two, a period in fact never entertained: “Gone is the post-Cold War illusion of benign convergence through interdependence. [The dating puts the onus squarely on Putin.] Something fundamental has shifted that goes far beyond a quarrel over territory. Putin has decided to define his power in conflict with the West. The only question is whether he has limited or all-out conflict in mind.” Excellent use of insinuation. One sees Russian troops massed in a giant armada up and down the East Coast. Does Putin, I query, define his power in conflict with the West, or does he have better things to do, such as the very modernization of Russia of which Cohen denies him (Russian backwardness—here Cohen is not alone in thinking—an act of faith) as beyond his and Russia’s scope?

This backwardness drives Russia eastward, perhaps menacing to America and the West because not an abject plea for friendship with the European Union. Cohen stumbles on something important: Western actions may be responsible for bringing Russia and China closer, although he denies their harmfulness and, again, backwardness (aka, absolutist, etc.), views China as rejecting the closeness: “This Russian decision [conflict with the West] has strategic implications the West is only beginning to digest. It involves an eastward pivot more substantial than President Obama’s to Asia. [Tell it to the Marines, given the carrier battle groups in place, and TPP as the economic complement to the military policy.] Putin is now more interested in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose core is China and Russia, than he is in cooperation with the G-8 (from which Russia has been suspended) or the European Union.” Russia, in passing, was suspended from the G-8 but China was excluded from TPP, whose purpose was and is such exclusion, thereby bringing the two nations closer together.

As for their relationship, Cohen along with US-EU policymakers are confident (with fingers crossed) that it is a nonstarter given the logic of the analysis—backward Russia consigned to the historical dust heap: “China reciprocates this interest to some degree because a Moscow hostile to the West is useful for the defense of its own authoritarian political model [he couldn’t resist getting in this dig] and because it sees economic opportunity in Russia and former Soviet Central Asian countries. But China’s fierce modernizing drive cannot be accomplished through backward-looking Russia. There are clear limits to the current Chinese-Russian rapprochement.” It is as though everyone wants to eradicate Russia because of its supposed backwardness. One example of the authoritative geopolitical stand, in all its glibness: “As a senior European official attending a conference organized by Harvard University’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs put it, Russia’s is a ‘loser’s challenge’ to the West, because it has given up on modernization and globalization, whereas China’s is potentially a ‘winner’s challenge,’ because it is betting everything on a high-tech, modern economy.”

And if Russia is not backward enough, let’s make it so. Its backwardness is a menace to the world. The punitive nature of the argument, not surprisingly, follows. Cohen writes, “Of course, being irrational and quixotic, losers’ challenges are particularly dangerous. Putin has gobbled a chunk of Ukraine after it pursued a trade pact with the European Union.” Now he is turning to intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear-capable bombers. The question then becomes: “How should the West respond?” Its self-evident democratic purity answers for itself, to continue to draw power away from Russia: “It [the West] cannot alter the appeal of its values to the world—witness the hordes of people dying in the attempt to get into the European Union. (Rich Russians have also

been pouring into the West in search of the rule of law.) So what Russia sees as Western ‘subversion’ (like the tilt of sane Ukrainians toward Europe) will continue—and it should.”

Yes, continue; pointedly there is shrillness here: the Russians lack the rule of law and “sane” Ukrainians tilt toward Europe. Not satisfied with that, Cohen calls for a more aggressive geopolitical posture: “The West must protect the right of peoples in the East-West in-between lands. [No doubt while this occurs, Putin is expected to sit on his hands.] The citizens of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and other states have the right to attain Western prosperity through Western institutions if they so choose. Poland and the Baltic states, now protected by membership of NATO, are inevitably magnets to them.” He mentions the very states where the military exercises and massive presence on the Russian border are taking place. (My recent CP article details the context of intimidation that Cohen lightly brushes over, even omitting reference to B-52s on the scene—yet which Putin is expected to ignore, what no Russian in light of the Nazi invasion of World War II could in good conscience do.)

Security of borders applies to Russia in point of monstrous human devastation more than to any other nation in modern times. Yet the writer proceeds insouciantly, “This new protection [of the in-between lands] should borrow from the policies behind Cold War protection of Germany: firmness allied to dialogue.” He quotes Tomasz Siemoniak of Poland, as did I, that NATO has been excessively cautious in its dealings with Russia, and then cites forces and materiel moved up to what has become the front: “NATO exercises in Latvia,” “a new 5,000-strong rapid-reaction NATO ‘spearhead force,’” and the move of “250 tanks and other equipment into temporary bases in six Eastern European nations [all of which] is something.” Yet, not enough; the prepositioning of a greater show of force is also occurring—a blatant provocation: “But the permanent and significant deployment of heavy weapons in the region is needed to send a message to Putin, as is greater European defense spending, and a clear commitment to maintain sanctions as long as Ukraine is not made whole with full control of its borders.” How about revisiting the overthrow of the legitimate government?

This is not a content analysis of a Roger Cohen op-ed in NYT; he is merely illustrative of the brainwashing which characterizes the privatization and militarization of American culture subjoined to a foreign-policy framework of war, intervention, and universal dominance. There are hundreds if not thousands of Roger Cohens inhabiting the nation’s think tanks and government/military offices—no better, no worse than he, all psychologically invested in the mythology of American Exceptionalism. His closing words in the piece extol what I find diminishes the nation’s democratic stature in the world: “In the end, the very Western ideas and institutions Putin demeans will be the West’s greatest strength in the long looming struggle against Russian counterrevolution.” What Cohen and his cohort cannot accept is that the United States is the supreme global example of counterrevolution.

JULY 3, 2015

### **Shake Down of Global Power System**

Greece’s financial crisis affects, as was intended, the structure of world power, a capitalist offensive led by the United States to eradicate Left currents in countries unified under the neoliberal banner of market fundamentalism, as the vital, necessary, and first step in the wider confrontation

with Russia, China, and observable tendencies toward socialism among developing nations. Poor Greece, quite literally, bearing the weight of serving as the object lesson in not genuflecting to the “troika” which itself is America’s representative in Europe in continuing its political-structural-military global design following ever since the ending of World War II. Ukraine as stalking horse was too transparent a confrontational mode with respect to Russia, although Ukraine must be seen in tandem with Greece, one military, the other economic, as factors in shaping pressures to contain, isolate, and dismember Russia (in process, risking nuclear war—thought worth it in testing capitalist supremacy). The convoluted mindset of US and Western policy makers reveals through the decades multiple strategies, starting with Truman’s virulent anticommunism and Marshall’s more enticing politics of food, to interventions including the Korean War (as surrogate for invading China) and counterinsurgency worldwide, especially Latin America (Kennedy), down to full-scale warfare intense yet still carefully limited in scope under Clinton, Bush, and Obama. The difference now is that America, working through the EU and therefore NATO, is becoming impatient or perhaps less risk-adverse in pursuing global dominance, with, not satisfied there, attention turning to Asia in completing the hegemonic design and framework.

Right now, Greece is in the spotlight, a process of knuckling under, intended as forcible confirmation of austerity as the expected behavior of all right-thinking (in both senses) nations who wish to participate, even against their will, in the supposed benefits of global capitalism. There are strict rules to adhere to, no deviations permitted, lest, as in Greece, welfare measures are introduced favoring working people, the poor, and pensioners, rather than, as customary, upper socioeconomic groups. Austerity is class warfare carried out by other means, the legitimated violence wealth and privilege, having government sanction, practices on those less fortunate. Syriza is a throwback to an earlier (circa 1950s) socialism in that it is at a transition point, still more capitalist than socialist, finding its way under Tsipras, or rather, because of EU intransigence and retaliation, having its way found for it, and hence seemingly dangerous because foreshadowing a future in which arm-twisting on behalf of austerity will not work. An example must be set; capitalism would not have it any other way (Merkel, prototypic in this and seeking as well Germany’s undisputed economic leadership of Europe, pointing the direction), and, ever mindful of the larger stakes, incorporating the military dimension of planning into capitalist consolidation. Behind or alongside of Tsipras stands Putin, enemy of enemies—until Li of China appears in the cross-hairs.

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Let’s go back a day or two, the deadline having passed on the bailout package (midnight, June 30) and Tsipras’s apparent capitulation—with minor changes suggested—next morning. Practically to a person, EU foreign ministers, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, said a resounding No, the deadline has passed, negotiations must start over, if at all—the if at all, dependent on the results of the referendum on Sunday (July 5), with the veiled threat, cancel the referendum in the first place! Playing hard ball like this merely underscores what Greece is up against: The above “troika,” avoiding legalisms, could have proceeded immediately to negotiations (July 1) and, based on the original terms, probably reached a settlement. Instead, it stonewalled, as though wishing for default, even for a No-vote on the original package, so as to make Greece more vulnerable, more subject to punishment, humiliated, the sought-for object lesson to keep Italy, Spain, and Portugal—all facing possible default—into line while also etching the policy of austerity into stone.

Suzanne Daley and Niki Kitsantonis's New York Times article, "Alexis Tsipras Bedges on Greece's Debt, but Meets a Cool Response," (July 1), despite the paper's general bias in favor of US foreign policy and, by extension, austerity, has interesting evidence on the context of pressure being applied to Greece: "An unexpected new effort by Greece to compromise with its creditors on a bailout package prompted a cool response from most of the rest of Europe on Wednesday as efforts to find a way out of the financial crisis confronting Athens remained chaotic." Why the cool response, when most of the conditions were met? And why "chaotic," unless presumably that of Greece's own doing? My suspicion, a settlement was not wanted, the troika counting on Tsipras's original negative reaction to the terms; now, modestly, he accepts "many of the terms of a bailout package that it [Greek government] had previously rejected," and wants only that "they are part of a broader deal to address the country's funding needs for the next two years"—a reasonable request in light of compliance with the package. But, no, and looming in the background, anger at the scheduled referendum. Merkel, meeting with Prime Minister Renzi of Italy on Wednesday, "repeated her position that there should be no negotiations until after Greece holds its referendum," what Tsipras later termed "blackmail" as to how the vote would go. In her own words, "The overarching goal has always been to create a union of stability in Europe, with responsibility and corresponding rewards," one sees the joining of antisocialism (even when socialism, in Greece, has not been actuated) and market fundamentalism.

Pointing out that the bailout agreement's expiration meant "Greece and its creditors would have to start over in assembling a package of aid and budget cuts," Daley and Kitsantonis correctly, if unintentionally, note the mistrust of and animosity toward Greece because of its socialist proclivities: "Moreover, many European officials remain deeply skeptical about whether Mr. Tsipras's leftist government would implement the more painful elements of any agreement." Yes, these officials have reason to be skeptical because "painful elements" merely reinforce the class structure and benefit upper groups—as many Greeks are well aware. At this point, as a vice president of the European Commission made clear, "we are now in a new situation. Now much more damage has been done and much more effort will be needed to restore the situation." This is hardly an invitation to succeed with negotiations, and as the reporters indicate, Greece was being blamed "for upending previous negotiations with its decision to call a referendum." Still, Tsipras was loathe to cut Greece's ties to the "troika," i.e., confront austerity head-on; speaking to the Greek people on television he said "that despite European characterizations, the vote Sunday was simply about a deal on how to manage the country's debt crisis and not a vote on whether to leave the euro as the country's currency." He stated, "No does not mean a rift with Europe. But a return to Europe with principles." This was not possible, however accommodating, given the way austerity stacked the cards against welfare provisions.

My New York Times Comment on the Daley-Kitsantonis article, same date, follows:

Schauble [German finance minister]: "We are defending Europe." Precisely, and for that reason I am sorry to see Tsipras cave. For what Greece signifies, as all agree, is the weakening or even break-up of unity. Unity here is not only political and economic but also military, the EU being inseparable from NATO and from US foreign-policy goals. Schauble knows what he is saying, that Greece is weakening the alliance in containing and/or confronting Russia.

The Greek default (Italy, Spain, Portugal possibly to follow, should the EU get punitive with Greece) is symptomatic of the prevailing stage in the restarted Cold War. As one who favors peace

and the rejection of American-led power politics, I applaud EU intransigence because in fact it WILL weaken the alliance and allow individual members to reach their own goals free from IMF and ECB dictation.

Tsipras, show some muscle. More in the world are in your corner than you realize.

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We turn next to Times reporter Andrew Higgins's article, "In Greek Debt Crisis, Mixed Messages and No Progress," (July 2), initially an attempt to be even-handed, which then fixes responsibility on the Greek government for the alleged chaos. (I say "alleged," because much of the script is written in Brussels and Berlin.) He picks up the narrative, bewilderment, Tsipras retreating, European leaders on expiration of the offer, negotiations if at all after Sunday's referendum. Higgins observes that "the crisis appears to simultaneously vindicate critics' complaints that Greece's left-wing governing party, Syriza, is flailing about with wild gambits, but also that Europe, led primarily by the German leader Angela Merkel, is obsessed with rules and procedures that have resulted in a long string of emergency meetings but no clear plan for addressing the Greek debt crisis." The problem with that is that obsession with rules and procedures fails to say what they're about, austerity, antisocialism, whatever comports with the ruling synthesis of a unified advance capitalism. Greece remains despite the meetings in the doghouse. And in fact, Higgins drops the other shoe: "Europe's paralysis, deepened by the ever-shifting, in-your-face tactics of Greece's left-wing government, has exposed a fundamental dysfunction—or, the designers would say, a deliberate muddle and ingenious safety valve—at the heart of the so-called European project, a push begun in 1957 to bring the states of Europe into 'ever closer union.'"

The date is significant, Europe's unification in face of presumed Russian conquest at a high point in the earlier stages of the Cold War, the reporter finding as "a deliberate muddle" the inability to reconcile a need for centralized power with the autonomy on internal affairs resting in the individual nations, thus creating a power vacuum which persists to this day. Higgins explains: "Europe is a union in which most real decision-making power, particularly on matters involving politically delicate things like money and migrants, rests with 28 national governments.... This tension has grown only more acute since the January 1999 launch of the euro, which now binds 19 nations into a single currency zone watched over by the European Central Bank but leaves budget and tax policy in the hands of each country, an arrangement that some economists believe was doomed from the start." And not, I suspect, only economists; for Greece, left to itself, has the potential to weaken the whole edifice, to keep the EU from realizing its present drift toward centralization under German dominance, in which case, more than a "dysfunction" of political structure, it [the EU] would undermine its own alter ego, NATO, which is on the front line of confronting Russia. Either Greece conforms to the "rules and procedures," or it must be ejected, the overriding issue being unity, whichever the outcome.

Higgins recognizes how bringing Greece into line and containing Russia dovetail, a good assessment that, even if unwitting on his part, shows the deficiency of present news coverage (on both topics): "With power so diffused by design, Germany, as the leading economic power, has often taken charge on critical policy issues. It forged a surprisingly durable European consensus around the need for sanctions against Russia over Ukraine and has pushed, and won solid support, for a tough line against Greece that many experts view as misguided." Germany unifies what was

intended as a decentralized framework; it also emerges as a powerhouse with an anti-Left agenda. The two go together, shades of the post-World War I and post-World War II settings.

Shame on Greece! The director of EuropaNova, a Paris think tank, states that the EU and Greece “are playing two completely different games. Syriza is a revolutionary party. It wants to burn down the house of capitalism.” He exaggerates, but it is a refreshing thought. Here the reporter provides the kiss of death: Tsipras before Greece’s January election “decorated his office in Athens with a picture of Che Guevara”—enough said, we know where responsibility lies for the (contrived) chaos. Our friend German finance minister Wolfgang Schauble, when asked about the future of the euro, says: “We can’t allow that to be ruined by a country that doesn’t follow the rules.” Whose rules? And to cast a wider net, the Trans-Pacific Partnership transposes the political-structural-military paradigm of hegemony from Europe to Asia. Now to be confronted is China as well. All in due course, first a satisfactory settlement of Greek nonconformity, solidifying the European base for engaging Russia, and then the (in)famous Obama pivot to the Pacific, military “assets” in conspicuous display, combat-ready, as further evidence of tightening the structure of world capitalism under American leadership.

My New York Times Comment on the Higgins article, same date, follows:

The reason for the discriminatory treatment of Greece is, of course, Syriza; for if the Tsipras government were not socialist, the remainder of the EU would be more lenient and find a way out of the current impasse. What we are witnessing is an internal version of the Cold War, Tsipras being viewed as a stand-in for Putin. Yes, what happens to Greece matters, an ejection or rejection from Europe having a self-fulfilling prophesy because Italy, Spain, and Portugal stand in the wings also bearing the scars of the austerity demiurge.

People count, or should, before balanced budgets, and the euro zone is market fundamentalism incarnate. This power play on behalf of global capitalism is ultimately going to fail; EU attitudes will harden and, because the Union is inextricably bound up with NATO (and standing behind, America and US foreign policy), one can expect intensification of tensions with Russia. Perhaps that is the goal in the first place, encouragement of the Cold War to forestall the system’s decline in face of an ascendant Russia, China, and more independent Latin America.

The EU would not take, via its treatment of Greece, this confrontational stance were it not for US backing, whose own motivation is beyond trade and commerce and has clear military purpose. Seemingly, 70 years later, we are back to Yalta once again, with no FDR to correct our fatalistic/belligerent course. Obama as Truman, Merkel as Churchill, history repeats itself.

JULY 6, 2015

### **Capitalism’s Self-Revealing Practices**

Don’t cry for me Argentina (although you might be next), because Greece is at the head of the line. Its mortal sin? Not only the billions owed international creditors, though that infuriates others in the European Union, the European Commission, and the IMF, all shock troops for global

capitalism, behind which in each particular as well as the general framework stands the United States; but also, possibly more or as important, the rampaging elephant in the room no one mentions: that the plea for European unity voiced by critics of the Greek vote, who perceive the EU monolith as now being threatened, is code for the military organization, NATO, which perfectly complements and gives weight to the political-structural order knitting together—beyond banking and trade—the resolute anti-Russian alliance, again with America’s blessing. The EU should be seen as everyone’s favorite stalking horse. For those in favor, it reflects counterrevolutionary power which must be stopped in its tracks, not just Putin and Russia under the umbrella of a re-started Cold War (which never in truth ended), but of course China, even though both have already made significant concessions to capitalism, and, more perilous, the Great Beyond, third world nations which are fighting to maintain indeterminate developmental patterns not subject to the dictates of the US, assisted by the IMF, World Bank, and imposed (“negotiated”) trade partnerships, i.e., globalization in the form of unilateral hegemony.

I would like to embrace everyone who made up the 61% No vote in Greece, courage in facing down the propagandistic barrage mounted by a cowardly Europe and its financial-industrial-militaristic elites who feared above all the idea of an alternative, an alternative which openly proclaims societal dignity and self-determination in its repudiation of the EU economic diktat of conformity to market fundamentalism and the rejection of Left governments and democratization of wealth distribution, and in their place the preservation of a rigid, unequal class system—intended natural fruits of austerity.

If Syriza and Tsipras were not involved, bailout would have proceeded long since. We see no hesitation on the part of the troika to providing relief to Italy, Spain, and Ireland, each having a government of the right sort. Europe has not appeared this right-wing in years, almost as though Greece were being punished after World War II for ELAS, decades of US scare-mongering, military assistance, and absorption of NATO forces in the US’s many interventions. Listen to the punitive voices of the EU foreign ministers and finance ministers following the referendum! Greece had no right to call a vote, no right to question the sacred demand for unity, no right other than that of obedience, submission, sacrifice—once more the logic of austerity, as it applies especially to the weaker members of the alliance.

And what of our rampaging elephant? Despite, or perhaps because of the serious issues raised by Greece’s vote rejecting an advanced-capitalist paradigm of growth in the name of austerity (plummeting gnp, staggering unemployment, and political turmoil with quasi-fascist groups becoming vocal), the wider thrust of US-EU policy goes largely unnoticed. Simultaneous with the political-financial uproar, there is the rather eerie escalation of military activity right up to the Russian border as well as the further encouragement of Kiev’s right-wing agenda in the Ukraine. Of the first, the Baltic countries are to all intents a staging area with the prepositioning of heavy military equipment, military exercises which now include the appearance of B-52s, and, Latvia in particular, belligerent statements coming from leadership that focuses on Greece but aimed in reality at Russia, as if the two were somehow confused as a single threat to the West, the only solution for which would be war.

In the minds of European leaders, encouraged—like the case with Ukraine—to think of Russia as an expansionist power, unrepentant in its hostility to capitalism (Putin as Stalin without the bushy mustache), confrontation founded on unanimous assent is an ideological-moral imperative, this



week Greece but the darkened future Russia, with China, perhaps more an American than EU obsession, targeted as already in the TPP, for containment, isolation, dismemberment—goals equally meant applicable to Russia. For the moment, Greece and Ukraine become intertwined in the confused if not psychopathic mindset committed to arresting the dynamics of world history. Of the two, Ukraine is the better long-term candidate for stirring up war fever in that it carries less economic baggage of selective discrimination at the hands of the West than does Greece and more the flagrant overthrow of a legitimate government as the model for further action on the international scene. The coup can never be admitted so that Ukraine becomes a festering wound requiring protests of innocence and the successive cover-ups, which together rationalize the motivation toward war. As for Greece, its turn to experience a coup may come soon. Brussels at this point thinks that extreme economic pressure would be sufficient to yield the desirable results, an end to the idea of alternative in the social vision of humanity.

JULY 8, 2015

### **Post-Senescent Stage of Advanced Capitalism; EU and Greece**

Why mince words, EU-sponsored austerity, Greece its present victim, carries forward the political-ideological thrust, long in the making, of US global economic and military dominance, the inner motif of the Cold War since its inception, with Europe always complicit in America's projection of world power. Greece today is not merely a stumbling block to EU unity, a theme widely heard in Brussels and Berlin, but an object lesson to be crushed, humiliated, forced to submit to advanced-capitalism's rules of the game to save itself from business cycle gyrations and depression, on penalty of default, ejection from the eurozone and, ideally, the EU itself as an unreliable (aka left-leaning) partner. Were there no Cold War (difficult as that is to comprehend), no conterminous boundaries between NATO and the EU which militarizes the latter's politics and politicizes the alliance's inceptive militarization, no conjuring act of making Russia the voracious Leviathan gobbling territory in its march westward, then Greece would hardly be a blip on the West's financial radar, an economy sufficiently small to be absorbed without difficulty as part of a European integrated system in America's grand design.

But that cannot happen, the Cold War—especially now with China's rise to power and possible linkage with Russia as fellow isolates, ripe for containment and dismemberment according to and inhering in capitalism's push for globalization self-defined and admitting none other alternative/socialist forms—having proceeded beyond even a stage of senescence so that all that remains to validate its identity is looming confrontation and war. Here Greece is not important for itself. By its treatment we see the face of legitimacy, by the US-EU-IMF ground rules of market fundamentalism, in purging alien elements stubbornly refusing to conform, again, austerity, to the imposed paradigm of class warfare favoring elite concentration of wealth, power, and privilege (aka disconnection from the masses through eviscerating welfare in principle and the social safety net in particulars). If Greece suddenly and magically came up with funds to satisfy its creditors, there would be gloom throughout the capitalist world (creditors always have a way to secure compensation from governments, even the "haircuts" not affecting profits) because making It an ideological object lesson of what happens when ruling groups are defied trumps in moral satisfaction, as confirmation of their rightful authority, all inconveniences of a financial and/or commercial nature.

One mark of the post-senescent stage of advanced capitalism is that traditional imperialist concerns of markets, investments, raw materials ownership and extraction, while essential to the sustainability and operation of a capitalist political economy, is now taken for granted, inscribed in the DNA of militaristic intervention and the conduct of multinationals, as meantime the capitalist process becomes ideologized into a deterministic mindset unwilling to brook dissent let alone defiance on what are deemed essential: privatization, habituation of the masses to a subordinate role in the social order, and ORDER itself as the ultimate criterion of capitalist “democracy”. A free people conducted a referendum on a vital question to them, to the consternation of the political-financial world. Let’s look at some examples of European leaders’ response, the referendum thought an implicit repudiation of their leadership as well as symbol of supreme disobedience (as though children defying their parents, so far has an authoritarian mental climate settled on post-World War II’s aftermath to the present).

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I am drawing on Liz Alderman and Jack Ewing’s article, “Rift Emerges as Europe Gears Up for New Talks on Greece Bailout,” New York Times (July 7), in which “rift” remains next to nonexistent in the EU’s rush to judgment—or rather, punishment. All EU authoritative voices point, in light of Greece’s independent posture, to a pessimistic view of what can be expected in restarting new negotiations, code for obvious stonewalling until Greece is brought to its knees. The reporters observe, “The country’s financial state is growing increasingly dire.” The European Central Bank would “extend just enough of an emergency lifeline to keep [banks] from failing,” a condition freely predicted shortly. In response Tsipras replaced his finance minister Yanis Varoufakis (a conciliatory effort to appease the EU governments and creditors which I believe was a serious mistake) with Euclid Tsakalotos (Oxford-trained, who handled negotiations since April) and brought all five main political parties into agreement that they “wanted any negotiation to include a discussion of relief from the country’s debt load—a key sticking point with creditors.” Their statement also included “immediate help to keep the banks afloat, quick economic aid to tackle unemployment and new bailout money to cover current debt obligations.” Even though they further gave assurances of “credible reforms based on the fair distribution of the burden and the promotion of growth with the smallest possible recessionary impact,” itself a statement anathema to the purposes of market fundamentalism, which mixes growth promotion with recession (for working people) and cares little for fair distribution (whether of rewards or burdens), it is evident that Tsipras and Greece were not going to play dead.

Such ingratitude! So thought especially the Germans, and as Alderman and Ewing note: “Germany, the eurozone country to which Greece owes the most money, remained resistant. A spokesman for the Finance Ministry said Berlin saw no new basis for negotiations with Athens at this point.” Merkel, to put a fine point on the matter, believed that “while Greece was still in the eurozone, it was up to Athens to determine whether the country would stay.” Valdis Dombrovskis of the European Commission said that the referendum vote “would ‘dramatically weaken’ the country’s negotiating position with creditors and made things ‘more complicated’.” Michel Sapin, France’s finance minister, declaring the vote “‘resolves nothing,’” was all for a settlement, provided Tsipras came “forward with a proposal containing ‘serious’ terms for a new bailout package.” Wheels appear to be in motion. Monday night (July 8) Merkel and Hollande met and warned Greece to come up with acceptable proposals “to avoid a possible exit from the eurozone,”

the expectation being that it would “present new debt proposals on Tuesday, when eurozone leaders are set to meet in Brussels.” Tsipras, to his credit, threw a monkey wrench into the timetable and proceedings, placing the ball in the EU’s court (seen momentarily).

My New York Times Comment on the Alderman-Ewing article, same date, follows:

ECB hinting at demanding greater collateral obviously seeks to bludgeon Greece back into accepting austerity. ECB merely expresses the wider posture of the EU and IMF. Tsipras will be rebuffed in coming negotiations, as in official statements that the results of the referendum will only make it harder on Greece.

The EU may have gone too far. If I were Tsipras’s adviser (and this will sound subversive if not traitorous to NYT readers), I would turn to Putin and Li, request necessary loans, and then join the new consortium that China has created. The EU is inseparable from NATO, together a confrontational force bringing the world closer to war. The US could not be happier, but already succeeded in turning Europe into a unified anti-Russian militarized force.

Greece unwittingly reveals the larger geopolitical dynamics involved in the current financial crisis: a bifurcated world structure designed to reduce the power of Russia and China and impose the framework of market fundamentalism on all comers, including developing nations. What is happening in Brussels and Berlin must be seen in tandem with the Trans Pacific Partnership and Obama’s Pivot, culmination of the decades-old Cold War with the militarization of finance and trade signifying US domination of the global system.

James Kanter’s NYT article, “Greece Said to Delay Offering New Plan on Debt,” which followed the one preceding, presents more negative voices—angered by the delay—from on high. No proposals yet for the eurozone finance ministers, then to be passed on by the heads of state in the evening. (There is no point in attempting to cover breaking news, my point being the good will of the remainder of the EU is not present, and that Tsipras, although he caved on Varoufakis, has not walked humbly into the lion’s den.) Next to the Germans, the most belligerent voice on Greece seems to be Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch head of the finance-ministers group, who claimed “the onus was on Athens to offer something new and specific,” presumably starting with reductions on government pensions and the creation of a more healthy business climate via favorable taxation policies. Kanter, using the phrase “friendly skepticism” to describe the views of Jean-Claude Juncker and other leaders, on whether Greece will offer the necessary concessions, makes light of the hard line being taken, particularly as he writes that “some of the eurozone finance ministers were openly hostile to the idea of reopening negotiations.” For example, Peter Kazimir, Slovak finance minister, said that “prolonging these debates and discussions would be detrimental to Greece and to the eurozone as a whole,” a thinly-veiled threat to come promptly to terms. Any near-term promise of debt-relief (with others, he wants surrendering proposals before further discussion) “was a ‘red line’ and ‘absolutely impossible’.” And Wolfgang Schauble, Germany’s finance minister, doubting “Greece’s ability to come up with a workable plan, also rejected the suggestion of debt reduction,” claiming it violated European regulations. No new agreement, he insisted, no assistance.

This attitude, total capitulation before relief, I surmise is what Tsipras anticipated and accounts for the militancy he is able to summon. Unfortunately, nobody is talking about the giant elephant in

the room, NATO, and the drain on Greece and the other EU countries required to support it. Greece, like Ukraine, is a pawn in the Cold War, both front-line states subject to the manipulation of the West in vitalizing an international capitalism beginning to gasp for air. If Greece turns to Russia for financial aid, the setback to the EU, with America and the IMF standing behind it, will be immense, giving meaning to “blowback” as not one or another intervention blowing up in our face, but capitalism itself creating the seeds of its undoing. For this reason, maybe cooler heads will prevail in the EU (my version of “friendly skepticism”) to forestall disunity as new pressures are devised to make the recalcitrant knuckle under to capitalist-defined measures of austerity, only, in the final analysis, making its demise the more certain.

JULY 10, 2015

### **Austerity as Class Warfare of World Capitalism**

Greece has Syriza, unacceptable, not because it is so radical (the fact that Syriza has its own Left means the remainder is quite moderate), but because Europe, strongly under American influence and support, has become rigidly Center-Right, hostile to all evidences of socialism and, antecedently, become enlisted in the global freezing into place of market fundamentalism, which translates militarily as anti-Russia and anti-China as though they exemplify (which they no longer do) communism. We are back to the post-World War II era, a continuous span of history to the present manifested in capitalism’s unwillingness to reconcile itself to social change, whether as the democratization of productive systems or acceptance of ideological themes sanctioning social welfare over individual gain. Retrograde ideas and values die hard, while nations and institutions which are based on them gradually petrify, lose their appeal, encounter resistance from within as well as without—and die.

Greece is a straw in the wind, at this point not more, and certainly not less. Europe will not crumble, nor the eurozone, should Greece be ejected from or quit the latter (even Merkel’s Germany cannot force it out of Europe itself), but departure or not, its position signifies a step in the awakening of countries no longer willing to acquiesce in their forcible subordination to the dictates of international capitalism. It is no coincidence Syriza and the referendum over continued austerity, a context of challenging the hard line taken in political-financial circles against rising living (including health) standards of the working people, occurred now. Capitalism is growing nervous, its vision of globalization, beyond yielding panics in the financial markets which might lead to their interconnected failures, reveals the cruelty inhering in a world system based on the hegemonic claims and ideological superiority of the US-led structural and military framework of alliances, already tested via America and NATO, in successive interventions. In sum, the emperor stands exposed; he wears no clothes, or rather, clothes himself in military hardware for starters, embellished by myths of free-market economics and, for the good of all, sacrificing to the needs and wishes of elites.

Austerity spells hierarchy, necessarily crammed down the throats of the unwilling or less convinced if all else fails, e.g., appeals to patriotism, fear of political or economic ostracism; but largely unnecessary in practice because advanced capitalism is predicated on a long-term habituation process of submission to its imperatives, from blind consumerism to acceptance of war as the realization of national honor, to the designation of the poor as degenerate, unfit, lacking in

moral worth. Oddly, EU leadership harbors these views toward Greece (as perhaps does America toward Europe as a whole and Russia and China beneath even moral notice). Degenerate, unfit, lacking in moral worth, all because Greece rejects austerity, as in essence the summum bonum of political economy and human conduct. A referendum declining such an honor could not but anger the righteous, the convinced, the true believers of capitalist ethnocentrism—we vs. they (the defaulters)—and more, capitalist xenophobia (those rejecting market fundamentalism), the enemy in both cases inhabiting a nether world of assorted socialist leanings, like decent pensions and adequate medical care.

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Yet the world's masses are slowly wising up. What is happening to Greece does not augur well for other nations caught in cycles of debt reflecting external circumstances not of their own making. America's own financial crisis sent shock waves through the world economy whose effects have still not dissipated, Greece, among others, paying the penalty. If Tsipras were CEO of Morgan, Chase, bailouts would not be held up until ironclad assurances of obeisance to austerity, as is now the case with Greece. I'm struck by the current hardships facing the Greek people, to which the European Central Bank seems unconcerned and EU leadership wholly indifferent. Consider New York Times reporter Liz Alderman's article, "Deal or No Deal, Greece Faces a Difficult Aftermath," (July 9), in which she writes, "As Greece hurtles toward a Sunday deadline for either reaching a bailout deal or risking a hasty exit from the eurozone, the one certainty is that its economy is already on the brink of collapse." Should the former happen, a bailout deal, the damage has already knowingly been done, as though creditors value setting an example more than settling accounts. The punitive attitude is clear, notwithstanding children's malnourishment and pharmacies close their doors. Nikitas Kanakis, local head of Doctors of the World, states: "Greece already has a humanitarian crisis, and we'll have to prepare for a harder aftermath if a deal collapses. I'm not sure how proud we should feel about letting social destruction return within Europe."

Does he exaggerate? Cargoes of food and medicine are piling up on the docks at Piraeus. Many blame the capital controls imposed by the Tsipras government, and in fact the situation is becoming dire, but is he and Syriza to blame, when the challenge to austerity is viewed as resistance to class warfare, and on the other side, dishonor, ingratitude, refusal to play by the rules of the game formulated from above? Alderman perhaps inadvertently, given NYT's bias (Syriza invariably has the label "leftist" attached to it), assigns less than full blame to Tsipras (he took office in January) for the dire conditions: "Five years of economic crisis have already taken their toll on Greece, hollowing out the solid middle class and causing tens of thousands of small and midsize businesses to close their doors." Capitalism when it plays hard ball has a way of devouring its young, or in this case, small and midsize businesses. Christian Noyer, the governor of France's central bank and on the ECB's Governing Council, stated that emergency lending to Greek banks would be ended unless the Greek government first reached "an accord" with creditors. In his words, "The Greek economy is on the verge of catastrophe." In passing, several analysts have said that the No vote in the referendum "may have doubled or tripled the cost of any new bailout." Greece must pay the price for its disobedience.

My New York Times Comment on the Alderman article, same date, follows:

The EU is practicing economic strangulation on one of its members primarily because Greece rejects conditions of austerity, a paradigm heartless in its evisceration of social services and wealth redistribution. If the Tsipras government were not socialist, the way would have been smoothed for further aid. As it is, the Left is unacceptable to global capitalism, for as an alternative political economy it violates principles of market fundamentalism.

This economic brinkmanship on the EU's part will prove ultimately harmful to the very system advocated by the US-EU-IMF because Greece—and down the road—Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland—will receive assistance from Russia and China and possibly become integrated into a new trading bloc. Thus runs the revitalized Cold War, taking on an economic form but spelling disaster for world peace. At this point, it looks like Greece will depart the eurozone, a step more drastic than US and EU leaders may realize, not least because of the repercussions for NATO. The unity of Europe is more than a slogan, it is the essential requirement for fortifying NATO and keeping up pressure on Russia, that which US foreign policy wants to see happen.

Strangely, we are back to the 1950s with Germany, burnishing its anticommunist credentials (though hardly accurate in describing today's Russia) emerging as the economic powerhouse of Europe, largely on its own terms. I can smell the gunpowder.

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A day passes, Thursday's midnight deadline (July 9) having resulted in the Tsipras government's apparent accommodation to the creditors' demands as pressures mounted. Can one blame him, with economic-political ruin staring Greece in the face? I originally titled this article, "US-EU-IMF Gang-Rape of Greece," perhaps a bit strong even for a learned and radical readership, however apt in light of the merciless ideology and practices directed against that nation to bring it to its knees. I criticized Tsipras for easing out Varoufakis as a needless compromise to the forces of Order (whether "troika" or my own list of culprits and their reasons, including protection of NATO for offensive purposes), yet his hands were tied and rather than seeing here utter capitulation he deserves credit for seeking to salvage Greek independence and autonomy, the latter to continue to pursue domestic welfare measures. Tsipras deserves our respect; he keeps his head high.

Thus Times' reporters Alderman and James Kanter's article, "Greek Plan Accepts Austerity to Get Debt Relief," (July 10), reveals some degree of movement on the part of Greece's severest critics to what may seem a politic compromise on Tsipras's part (but remains true to longer-term objectives)—altogether an improvement, although not assuring a satisfactory outcome. Greece may still depart, or be forced to, the eurozone, creditors now dimly aware of the consequences, structural and military, to unity of such an outcome. Suddenly one sees the mock-generosity of Schauble, Germany's finance minister, to keep the situation stable, testimony to Tsipras's own applied pressures. The reporters write, "Only a day after grim predictions of financial and social collapse in Greece, a scramble appeared underway to work out the details of a new bailout package to bring the country back from the brink of falling out of the euro." Resistance worked, even though Alderman and Kanter pointed to what appeared as Tsipras "capitulating to demands on harsh austerity terms that he urged his countrymen to reject in the referendum last Sunday, like tax increases and various measures to cut the costs of pensions."

Stonewalling cuts both ways, and one senses that the EU blinked first, putting a best face on the matter. The reporters concede, “But Mr. Tsipras sought a three-year bailout loan totaling 53.5 billion euros (about \$59 billion) and asked creditors to commit to discussing restructuring the nation’s massive debt,” the latter especially important and until now totally off the table. Then Schauble, who admitted that “‘debt sustainability is not feasible without a haircut,’ or write-down of debt,” and even more astonishing, in light of past pronouncements, Donald Tusk, president of the European Council (and former prime minister of Poland), said that any “‘realistic proposal from Athens needs to be matched by realistic proposal from creditors on debt sustainability to create win-win situation.’” Prior to today (July 10) no-one on that side wanted a win-win anything, so imperative was it to punish and humiliate Greece.

Light at the end of the tunnel? The reporters are cautiously optimistic, reflecting the mood of European leaders and their Swiss Guard in the think tanks. “It is still too early to gauge,” they write, “whether this prospective bailout will be any more effective than earlier pacts in balancing the demands of the creditors against some relief from austerity. What was breathtaking, however, was how in a matter of hours the entire dynamic in the Greek crisis seemed to shift, from apocalyptic warnings of a Zimbabwe in the Balkans, to a fresh optimism that the basics of a deal could be worked out.” I surmise, Europe recognized it had gone too far. The reporters write further: “Prospects for a deal improved through the day as a procession of European leaders came around to Mr. Tsipras’s conviction that pure austerity measures were insufficient in their own right and had to be accompanied by a commitment to reduce the burden of Greece’s stupendous debt.” This shift in opinion was helped by the role of France (heretofore, Hollande and Merkel were two peas in an austerity pod) in providing political support and technical assistance to Greece. France assisted in “mak[ing] sure the Greek proposal, submitted just before the midnight deadline, would be as thorough and salable as possible to Greece’s creditors and would smooth the way for a compromise on a new bailout package to keep Greece afloat financially and inside the euro.”

This last is exciting because it suggests a thin crack at the top between Germany and France in European unity, possibly isolating Merkel in the future as the chief spokesperson for austerity and bringing the practice as both EU and national policy under closer scrutiny. Merkel is unrepentant, this week stating her opposition “to actually writing off some of Greece’s debt,” although perhaps willing to reduce interest rates and extend the payment period. Be grateful for small favors, when face-saving is at stake. Valls, France’s prime minister, was more forthcoming: sustainability meant reducing the debt. There matters stand, what I termed the giant elephant in the room whom no one mentions, NATO, is nevertheless vulnerable to any fractionation of the political alliance, making Greece of major significance in the future course of international politics and, as the possible moderation of EU policies, the easing of Cold War tensions.

My New York Times Comment on the Alderman-Kanter article, same date, follows:

“...an open wound in Europe’s southern and eastern flank.” Finally we’re getting somewhere. Nobody will admit that the EU is the political-economic complement of NATO, perhaps better, NATO’s surrogate to make military interventions appear more normal. Greece, of course, should it be ejected (which now seems increasingly unlikely), would destroy Western unity in its confrontation with Russia, the prepositioning of heavy equipment and joint maneuvers including B-52 bombers near the Russian border already in evidence.

Even Merkel and Germany, laboring under the fiction that Russia fully intends to invade and gobble up the West, or propagates the Cold War myth the better to consolidate its own power and influence on the Continent, finally has to adopt a softer posture toward Greece for geopolitical reasons—hostility toward Russia. How reminiscent of the World War II setting, when the appeal of anticommunism (Russia today is hardly communist) allowed Hitler to take over much of Europe. No, Merkel is not Hitler, nor Germany, Naziism, yet the historical parallel remains of a Germany manipulating European fears (include Britain and the US here) to its advantage.

The US is hardly an innocent bystander, having initiated the global financial crisis, nurturing NATO for the role it is now playing, and continuing the Cold War through demonizing Russia and Putin. Greece is caught in the middle of a global power struggle and merits our compassion.

JULY 14, 2015

### **Eurocapital Vanquishes Greece: A “Hard, Dark, Painful” Future**

People are hurting in Greece, not everyone, for those well-off and tourists still frequent the open-air cafes past midnight, but the unemployed, the poor, the elderly, having suffered already under the political-economic regime of austerity since the 2008 financial crisis, who make of today's nation an example of unrelieved social misery reminiscent of the Great Depression (less because of bank closings than because of soup kitchens, people homeless, sleeping in the parks, private charities working full-time to serve the hungry). I speak of right now, as eurozone finance ministers bicker in Brussels over the details of the Tsipras Government's proposals to satisfy its creditors, proposals on taxes and pensions which were resoundingly defeated in last week's referendum, and now put forward as a last-ditch effort for Greece to remain solvent and not face utter financial collapse. After writing in the weekend edition of CounterPunch, “Austerity as Class Warfare of World Capitalism,” praising Tsipras's resistance to the EU-ECB-IMF (troika) demands, which, to punish its Left government, would have crippled Greece's own efforts at recovery and forced its categorical submission, as favored by Germany, Finland, and the Baltic countries, to the creditor-dominated orthodoxy of European haute capitalism, I began to have partial doubts about both the wisdom of the proposals and Tsipras's own socialist convictions.

Why? Toughening out the stance toward the troika might have succeeded, when it might have become recognized that standing behind the purely economic considerations (and the absolutist mental-set that guided its enforcement) were the more decisive reasons for maintaining EU unity, that the political shell covered the military underpinning or core—NATO, as protector of Europe against Russian expansionism and vehicle for Europe's own, the US standing solidly behind and militarily-financially facilitating it, move to expand eastward, in confrontational mode to contain, isolate, and dismember Russia. Unity uber alles, Greece sticking out like a sore thumb (particularly with Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland facing the same debt pressures, and liable to EU moral rejection and financial ejection, themselves taking courage from Greece's resistance) and hence mucking up the works of military preparedness, as right now going on at the Russian border. This, in addition to the obvious advantages of supporting unity on economic ground rules, which favors Germany at the expense of Europe's South and East. (It should be mentioned that German amnesia



about debt reduction, its own, and now with respect to Greece, reveals cynicism and opportunism of the first water; for by the London Debt Agreement of 1953, 60% of Germany's foreign debt was cancelled, along with the restructuring of its internal debt. Ah, the wonders of the Cold War and open sesame to anticommunism! If only Tsipras was leading a right-wing government, all would be well.)

So much for the wisdom of the proposals (i.e., concessions), a mixed picture that could be argued both ways as to whether survival and thence independence and prosperity could be maintained outside the union. I think yes (with assistance from the BRICS as one example to keep in mind), but, second, what of Tsipras's socialist convictions? Until yesterday I had no doubts, and still would not pass judgment (we've seen enough unfortunate backbiting in Left circles), yet I was surprised in reading the text of the actual proposals that more than taxes and pension cuts were involved in the austerity measures. The press and public discussion seemed truly amiss and shortsighted here, for I think he crossed the line and did incalculable harm to Greece's position, austerity or no austerity. Let me explain with first the immediate background, a clear betrayal of socialist principles (and possibly what Germany had in mind all along).

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The operative (and hateful) term is, privatization, to be excluded from any schema for democratizing the social structure and political economy, yet included in the Tsipras government's recommendations. The proposals have received widespread commendation, including that by some EU and IMF officials, and where not commendation at least encouragement, helped by support of the French government (which helped draft them) and handily passed—with, it is true, Syriza defections—by the Greek Parliament as prelude to their presentation to the finance ministers. Yes, the government capitulated to the troika on key demands which had been voted down by the Greek people—with Tsipras's leadership on behalf of the No vote—in last Sunday's referendum, a turnaround on his part that should not be ignored. Before that, he identified austerity as the arch villain of human freedom, designed and intended to crush and humiliate Greece, forcing it back into the eurozone mold and abandoning any thought of an alternative developmental course with emphasis on social-welfare planning and execution. Austerity in practice is the degradation of working people and a heinous crime against humanity.

What has changed? What remains unstated? Of course, privatization. If Tsipras's concessions have continued to meet with skepticism among leaders in Germany and Eastern Europe, they have also met with opposition in his own party, Syriza, from the Left, as well as popular demonstrations in the streets, although in the former case, perfectly straightforward, debt reduction or forgiveness was foremost, in the latter, we do not know if privatization figured prominently in the dissent. If not, I must reluctantly criticize Tsipras and his party, he for offering, it for overlooking, this provision. Here Marx's distinction between quantitative and qualitative matters arises: the reported provisions, e.g., cutting pensions and raising the retirement age to 67, would hurt mightily, yet they could be painfully absorbed, while what has been neglected and only just now reported as part of the bailout package, the privatization of major government properties, strikes a mortal blow at Greek professions of democracy. We thus enter the qualitative realm of no return, for beyond its symbolic value as violating the principle of the people's property under socialism (even under capitalism the public sector when complementing the private has been accepted), this compromise

on privatization is a stark betrayal of principle for a party and in a country struggling to realize its independence from vested private wealth and upper-classes' societal dominance.

Regional airports, the ports of Pireaus, Thessaloniki, and Hellinikon, and other public properties, are explicitly mentioned, to be opened to bidding, an ideological retreat on Tsipras's part negating any claim to resisting creditor demands, much less to articulating a socialist vision. What next? If Greece succeeds in gaining troika approval, the proposals taken as a whole become tantamount to rejoining the eurozone stripped of any pride, crawling back on its knees, testifying to the power of international capitalism, the United States in the saddle, and all this portends for a unified European bloc prepared to intensify the Cold War against Russia. If, on the other hand, Tsipras had remained true to his announced principles, and Greece was forced out of the eurozone, a chain reaction might ensue in which the aforementioned countries, all similarly disadvantaged by EU membership, would be forced to leave when their moment of potential default arose, thereby weakening the alliance, with its heavy military implications, and forestalling a head-on collision with Russia. Staying forthrightly independent, Greece could have played a significant role in easing Cold War tensions, resisting the global tide toward privatization (which gives new life to monopoly capitalism), and giving hope to other countries similarly disadvantaged through the machinations of international capitalism.

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The story is familiar, where advanced capitalism sinks its claws into the soul of a nation, Greece only the latest, most conspicuous example because of financial crisis and gathering global tensions. New York Times reporter Anemona Hartocollis's article, "Greece Financial Crisis Hits Poorest and Hungriest the Hardest," (July 11), is a grim reminder of what privilege brings in its wake, and often at its behest. She begins: "Behind the lace curtains of a soup kitchen run by a parish in the humble Athens neighborhood of Kerameikos, the needy and hungry sit down to a plate of sliced cucumbers, three hunks of bread, a shallow china bowl of chickpea soup and often a piece of meat. Sometimes there is even ice cream, a special treat." She adds, "People prize the refectory, run by a priest, for its homeliness, and they travel long distances to fill their empty stomachs at least once a day." Yet Father Ignatios Maschos worries there will not be enough food "if the country's economic paralysis continues," as appears likely even if "a last-minute deal [with creditors is struck] to avert a Greek exit from the euro." Which is why he says, "It will be hard, dark, painful," while he watches "a long line of people wait[ing] for their turn to eat at the communal tables," then observing sadly, "We will have trouble receiving food."

It is the same elsewhere. "Poverty in Greece," she writes, "has been deepening since the financial crisis began more than five years ago. Now, aid groups and local governments say they are beginning to feel the effects ... of bank closings, as Greece struggles to keep its financial system from failing and to break out of years of economic hardship. And any deal with creditors this weekend will bring further cuts in government spending. It will also bring higher taxes and, as a consequence, more short-term pressure on the economy." These are shrewd observation, not only that the Tsipras government cannot be held responsible for the current crisis and plight of the people, but also that austerity feeds a downward spiral of neglect, with social-welfare spending cut to the bone. She notes, "By some accounts, lines for food, clothing and medicine have grown fivefold in parts of the capital in the last two weeks alone."

One further example of several: “Since July 3, after the cash controls began, the Venetis chain of about 80 bakeries has expanded its charity program and has been giving away about 10,000 loaves of bread a day—a third of total production—to the destitute, families with many children, the unemployed and retirees.” Panayiotis Monemvasiotis, the company’s general manager, said: “In the third round of austerity measures, which is beginning now, it is certain that in Greece there will be no consumers—there will be only beggars.” In neighborhoods where tourists don’t venture, e.g., Omonia Square, “people in ragged clothes can be found sleeping on sidewalks and in public parks.” Another large soup kitchen in Athens “is run by the city government in collaboration with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Athens, near Omonia on Pireos Street,” serving “600 to 1,000 people a day,” Athens itself “helping support 20,000 people a day with groceries, hot meals and other basics.”

Eurozone governments, leaders, and largely unsympathetic citizens, in the better-off countries, merely look on; there must be no budging from the absolute rules of austerity, Germany in particular, as Alison Smale and Melissa Eddy, in their NYT article, “Greek Debt Crisis Pits Greeks Against Germans,” (July 11), bring out, missing though that Germany’s alleged fixation on the anal stage of development is really a ploy for the promulgation and enforcement of the rules from which they enjoy undisputed leadership of Europe. Their rules, austerity, market fundamentalism, etc., establish a power relationship in politics and economics difficult for Greece and other financially weaker countries to counter. They observe: “In insisting that Greece can stay in the euro only if everyone sticks to the rules, Germany has acted almost classically to stereotype. Close enough, but they see order as an end in itself, rather than the means to dominance: “Its fondness for orderly procedure—the foundation of its post-1945 democracy—has prevailed even over its desire to lead 21st century Europe.” The meeting of eurozone finance ministers in Brussels (extended to Sunday) showed Germany was not alone “with reservations about extending negotiations to keep Greece and its banks afloat. But as Europe’s de facto leader, Germany has been the most visible and influential, its penchant for process standing in sharp contrast to the chaotic sequence of decisions and reversals emanating from Athens.” So much for the reporters’ objectivity; yet they do make of “order” a less than desirable national trait (to which I would append hierarchy as one of its logical derivatives). “Those questioning the Germans’ obsession with rules,” they write, “have only to look at what Berlin calls ‘the black zero,’ meaning a balanced budget.” Rules, reified to cement power relations, have a way of freezing into place societal domination. I think this is what Julia Klockner, from Merkel’s Christian Democrats, intends: “There are clear rules, and anybody who doesn’t stick to the rules cannot be an example for others.”

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Tsipras’s proposals passed an important hurdle, but not without damage to his domestic credibility. Liz Alderman and Andrew Higgins’s NYT article, “Greece’s Parliament Approves Prime Minister’s Bailout Plan,” (July 10), shows, despite an overwhelming vote in favor, defections which muddy the picture of uncompromising resistance, his own, but Syriza’s also. They describe the scene: “And crowds gathered outside the Parliament building in Athens on Friday evening to protest Mr. Tsipras’s abrupt U-turn, with many saying they felt betrayed after he had urged them to reject the bailout in the referendum last Sunday.” Parliamentary approval, however, was only a first and mandatory step to bringing the package before the collected finance ministers, who were claiming that universal acceptance alone would do (“Germany’s longstanding insistence that all 19

countries that use the euro must follow the rules”). Tsipras soldiered on, Merkel, the Margaret Thatcher of Central Europe, was not fazed by parliamentary passage of the proposals; in the words of her spokesperson: “We will wait until the institutions examine them and express their opinion.” The procedure was followed, no agreement reached by the ministers, whose deliberations continued on Sunday. And even if that hurdle were crossed, there was still the heads of state of the eurozone countries, with the larger EU leadership’s attendance abruptly cancelled.

For Greece, the situation, even with the compromises offered, was not bright. NYT reporter James Kanter’s article, “Meeting on Greece Debt Breaks Up With No Deal,” (July 12), refers to the mistrust that is directed to Greece about repayment, thus “leaving the Continent hours from what could be a historic rupture.” Perhaps the EU-ECB-IMF people are finally getting serious, the issue to be decided by the heads of state (if it gets that far) being, “whether the country can remain in the euro currency union.” More of course is at stake than that, the defection or forcible withdrawal from the union of others and the viability of NATO as the militaristic foundations of the EU’s political expression, supporting NATO’s interventionist role in aiding the US in furtherance of its own wars and interventions suitably disguised as an internationalized effort (the much bruited “friends and allies”). By Sunday, things, as expected, were getting ugly. The German finance ministry circulated a paper calling for Greece’s removal from the eurozone for five years, then “reapply[ing] for membership,” one surmises suitably purged of radicalism. Conditions dire? Kanter writes, “Greece’s banks are teetering on insolvency, the government is running out of cash to meet its day-to-day obligations, and without an infusion of aid, additional payments to international creditors will be missed in coming weeks.” Whatever the outcome of this long, darkened weekend, insofar as actions are taken favorable to Greece (should that occur), the animus to the Tsipras government will remain, as will soup kitchens, people sleeping in parks or on sidewalks, as austerity grinds down the spirit of a heretofore free people.

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It’s over; if the sun is shining, it’s a false light. Eurocapital (including the US, still power behind the local throne, satisfied that unity ensures confrontation with Russia, and the IMF, providing the technocratic turning the screws, also satisfied, having transformed austerity into an engine for privatization) has won, the Greek people more firmly incarcerated in the political-financial prison ordained for them by forces of capitalist ORDER, have lost—dramatically so. I cannot fault Tsipras. He tried. But in my fantasy world I am reminded of the closing years of World War II when ELAS put up resistance to the Nazi occupation (to the hostile response of the US and Britain) followed in 1947 by the Marshall Plan to eradicate all Left social movements in Europe. EU-ECB-IMF symbolically represents a new Marshall Plan, Greece, the same locale, Russia, the same enemy. One hoped the outcome would be different. Varoufakis was right that Greece was up against financial terrorists—terrorists swathed in the legitimacy of capitalist market fundamentalism.

This Monday morning, after the late-night session of eurozone leaders in Brussels, we learn nothing about the details of the settlement (themselves probably not worked out yet, to determine how much further the screws can be tightened), except that negotiations toward a solution have started. As NYT reporters Kanter and Higgins, in their article, “European Leaders Reach Agreement to Resolve Greek Debt Crisis,” (July 13), make clear, quoting Tusk of the European Council, “serious reforms” are to be demanded, the atmosphere one of “distrust” because

Germany among others fears Greece will not carry out its side of the “deal”—some deal, when Merkel, recommending acceptance by the German Parliament, could say (gloat?) at the news conference, “The country which we help has shown a willingness and readiness to carry out reforms.” And the reporters note, apropos of my emphasis above on privatization as integral to the settlement: “As part of Greece’s commitments, Ms. Merkel said, a fund will be created to use the proceeds from selling off assets owned by the Greek government to help pay down the country’s debt.” Greece surrenders public property to soften its misery through compensating those who’ve brought it on in the first place.

More humiliation/dependence: “Greece will be required to also seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund and agree to let the organization continue to monitor the country’s adherence to its bailout commitments,” this despite the Greek government’s resentment of the IMF’s “continued role” and viewing “the fund’s involvement as unwanted meddling.” The more things change, the more they remain the same. The Greek Parliament must act quickly to ratify the settlement, this, as I pointed out, before funds are forthcoming to stave off national bankruptcy. I give “a bleary-eyed” Tsipras the last word: “We gave a tough battle for six months and fought until the end in order to achieve the best we could, a deal that would allow Greece to stand on its feet. We faced hard decisions, tough dilemmas, [and Greek authorities finally] assumed the responsibility of averting the extremist ambitions of the most conservative circles in Europe.” He here captures the flavor of World War II (my paraphrase for modern times, Never underestimate the power of capitalism). No ELAS, however, or other guerilla force stands in the shadows; perhaps in the circumstances Syriza will radicalize further.

My New York Times Comment on the Kanter-Higgins article, same date, follows:

Events played out as expected. The troika was too powerful for Greece to achieve dignity and independence. I regret that Greece did not do the seeming unthinkable: exit the eurozone, as Germany, Finland, and the Baltics wished and strove for, rather than accept austerity measures deeply injurious to the Greek people. Merkel won; Germany confirmed its power and leadership in the Union. Now Italy, Spain, etc., will also be forced to toe the mark—or experience the same pain that Greece is going through. But, for the US, the EU-ECB-IMF can do no wrong, for behind the jockeying and call for unity lies NATO, the militarized foundation of the EU. With Greece a disruptive force, the West cannot get down to the serious business intended all along: confrontation with Russia aimed at its ultimate isolation and dismemberment. The leaders’ decision in Brussels will be a milestone, marking acceleration of the Cold War. And at bottom, a clarion call for privatization, directly implemented in the agreement. For Greece must now sell its regional airports and ports themselves to provide a fund for repayment of debt. Market fundamentalism plus militarism make for a heady brew. I call it fascism, others may call it freedom or democracy. Fittingly, after two world wars Germany once again is a prime mover in world history. This time it has the full backing of America, itself busily creating a similar context via the Trans-Pacific Partnership, now China as well as Russia the target.

JULY 15, 2015

## **Continuities in Nuclear Hegemony: US and Iran**

America believes itself the product of Immaculate Conception, nowhere more evident than in having global custodianship of nuclear weaponry, originally, exclusive possession and use, as though perhaps part of God's design, and later, when after 1949 that was no longer attainable, presumptive use as a moral right and, as with all armaments, possession of an overwhelmingly preponderant stockpile. The US had a giant head-start, Alamagordo, July 16, 1945, Hiroshima, August 6, 1945, Nagasaki, August 9, 1945, the latter two the only times used for the annihilation of human populations, all brought on by the presumably exigencies of war when unity of the Great Powers was imperative, yet already conceived as a warning to the Soviet Union, and hence even before World War II was concluded the beginning of the Cold War. American atomic policy, quickly shifting from a defensive to offensive posture, became under Truman a cynical mode of power politics aimed at the dissolution of wartime unity, his presidency which betrayed a gross personal ignorance and arrogance only rivaled by that of Reagan and G.W. Bush having therefore imperial ambitions fueled by an obsessive, irrational anticommunism. Truman contributed to the climate of fear by his lack of remorse over the nuclear devastation and endeavor through the Baruch Plan to maintain the postwar US monopoly on the Bomb, as if to say America could be secure only when it has frozen into place the differential relationship, when it comes to dealing death, with others, a kind of ethnocentric/paranoid mental-set, enemies everywhere requiring and necessitating a total response.

One cannot understand 2015 without going back to 1946, John Kerry the Dean Acheson of our time, and Truman *sui generis* as encapsulating all of the retrograde features of America's political-military leaders, lacking even Obama's finesse at deception and warmongering. Return, then, to the war's aftermath; the Baruch Plan in microcosm points toward the future, its purpose—coming June 14, 1946—after the bombs had been dropped and the war over, signifying both the confirmation of American power and a holding action to keep its atomic monopoly in place. Baruch did not warn, much less consult with, the Soviets before presenting his plan to the UN International Atomic Commission. Yet as in a key provision, that the veto would not, despite being part of the Security Council structure, apply to nuclear matters, it was clear Russia was to be denied, down to every detail, research and development on the Bomb itself but also peaceful applications of nuclear energy. This attempt at exclusiveness was, of course, a fool's game in that scientists at the time warned that enjoying a monopoly of the Bomb could not last (the Acheson-Lilienthal Report gave Russia 5-20 years to catch up; it did so in three). The US wanted stability. Russia, however, was not passive.

If the Baruch Plan was not implemented, it was not for want of trying. To read the meticulousness of the enumeration of provisions in the Plan is to see the resemblance to the negotiations in Vienna, the US again—and at all points in between—fully committed to preserving a privileged position objectively at odds with the reality of proliferation, starting with Russia. This clinging to a hegemonic vision speaks volumes about the urgency of the US effort in Iran and worldwide, as though America could have its way come hell or high water, and, frequently, through resort to nuclear blackmail, usually subtly expressed. Indeed, the Baruch Plan was inseparable from the Truman Doctrine, a God-given right of containment, in which, as now, all enemies look alike as communist under the skin, the aforementioned ethnocentric mindset, Iranians feared and hated as a

legacy of decades' long anticommunist hysteria. Too, parallels between then and now can be seen in the way the US internationalizes its goals of self-interest, in 1946, the UN, in 2015, the Group of Six plus One, while still firmly guiding the structure of negotiations (also, just as we use NATO in the present confrontation with Russia).

International control was a misnomer from the start, the Baruch Plan defining those competent to serve on the International Commission being only those who had a "proven competence," which meant, given that the US was the first on the scene, only those involved with the Bomb in the first place, the regime of tight controls preventing other nations from developing nuclear weapons. Control was predicated as well on the Soviets giving up the veto in this area. A happy, one-sided arrangement, taking us again to Vienna nearly seventy years later. Sanctions have been in place for nine years. Nuclear nonproliferation is the boast of having been achieved and chief talking point. (Yet if the US was opposed to proliferation, how explain its failure to stop Israel's nuclear development, as was done with Iran?) Like Baruch, Vienna was meticulous: reduction of enrichment capacity and stockpile of low enriched uranium, the core of Arak's heavy water reactor to be removed, an elaborate inspection protocol, restrictions on the trade of conventional weapons and ballistic missile technology, etc., and then at some point a lifting of sanctions and the unfreezing of Iranian assets abroad. Even then, one can hear the howls, from Netanyahu and the US Congress.

Finally we have New York Times reporters David Sanger and Michael Gordon's article, "Iran Nuclear Deal 'Built on Verification,' Obama Says," (July 14), showing the requisite enthusiasm: "The deal culminates 20 months of negotiations on an agreement that President Obama had long sought as the biggest diplomatic achievement of his presidency." Like Angela Merkel and Greece, achievement is measured by how greatly Iran has been demeaned, its sovereignty reduced, the mistrust in which it is enveloped still obvious. It must come before the International Atomic Energy Agency within three months, stated Kerry, "to address all questions" about its past actions, completion of this being "fundamental for sanctions relief." The cruelty of the sanctions, the reporters readily admit: "Across Tehran, many Iranians expressed hope for better economic times after years in which crippling sanctions have severely depressed the value of the national currency, the rial. That in turn caused inflation and shortages of goods, including vital medicines, and forced Iranians to carry fat wads of bank notes to pay for everyday items such as meat, rice and beans."

Meanwhile B-52 bombers have been engaged in maneuvers in Latvia, near the Russian border. How take seriously US claims to opposition to nuclear proliferation (and nuclear war itself, given the role of B-52s) on behalf of a peaceful world?

My New York Times Comment on the Sanger-Gordon article, same date, follows:

America is the archetypal expression of chutzpah. Its strategy of nuclear preeminence has not changed since the Baruch Plan following World War II. Rather than work for the elimination of nuclear weapons, it attempts to restrict their development by others and continues to modernize its own stockpile. Who gives America this dispensation to regulate the world, especially when its own arms budget dwarfs that of the remainder, and itself has engaged in wars and interventions, not to say covert operations, at its own choosing?

The US nuclear umbrella protects Israel, which has its own arsenal. How secure can Iran feel under those circumstances? Perhaps the present agreement is a good thing because it

limits further nuclear proliferation. But the sanctions could not but have turned Iran into a critic, when, as now, it nonetheless has opposed ISIS (for which it has been given little credit). One cannot but feel that Israel with its regional monopoly is the elephant in the room, Netanyahu today threatening to lobby Congress to obstruct/destroy the deal.

Yes, it is right that Iran cease planning and the production of weapons-grade materials leading to the achievement of the Bomb. If peacetime use of atomic energy was its goal in the first place, that much the better. Nuclear weapons are the kiss of death, a moral curse, a contamination of humane values. Iran is better off without them. But this does not let the US off the hook for arrogance and failures at disarmament.

JULY 16, 2015

### **Riots in Athens: EU's Impending Collapse?**

People move events. The Greek people are trying to shape their own history. They aren't there yet—even the Left hasn't quite joined them. But a coalescence of forces is on the horizon: either Syriza radicalizes or it will be left behind. Capitalism by its very harshness is creating its own antithesis. Ideological labels are not important; what is, is a genuine people's government. The riots in Athens, while the Greek Parliament passed the austerity measures, may be the first sign of the breakup of the EU, itself a political formation of advanced capitalism unable to meet the needs of its poorer members.

“Breakup” is too strong a term. Shrinkage, disruption, and greater transparency, the last signifying EU's role as spearhead for US-defined globalization, the mix of market fundamentalism and militarism, would be difficult to hide and all three revealing unity as a German-inspired economic monolith for achieving an intra-Europe division of labor, nations rich (North) and poor (South), while providing political cover for NATO in its continued prosecution of the Cold War. Austerity is repression, pure and simple. It is also, as I recently pointed out, the framework for class warfare, in both cases to the extreme detriment of working people. The people in the Athens street know this, know that Tsipras and Syriza have not done right by them. The public workers' union went out on strike Wednesday. Crowds gathered before Parliament in the evening. Tsakalotos, the new finance minister, was shaken, reluctant to approve the bailout, in microcosm, representing the many, in and out of the party, who saw the mounting pressures and if not succumbed then made a forced choice.

This was not the affirmation one expects from a basic settlement, and rather, a period of deliberation, of gathering force that, should the EU turn the screws further, might well explode, not as revolution, but a willingness to say No and from there leave the eurozone and the EU itself. Why would Germany and the other stalwarts, Finland, the Netherlands, and the Baltic countries care? For the reason that Greece is a living refutation of all the stalwarts value: balanced budgets, taxation favoring business growth, gradual diminishment of labor rights, erosion of pension and social-welfare programs, etc. By bringing Greece to its knees validates austerity: there is no other way than this, the best of all possible worlds. Capitalism, both in Europe and America (indeed everywhere), thrives on false consciousness lest its destructiveness becomes apparent. Hence, it must thwart Left social movements; antecedently, it must deny the idea of alternatives, that which shows a better way to social justice, peace, a humane life.



Greece is on the edge of the precipice, struggling not to be pushed over into the abyss. It wants to fight back (here calls to national honor and dignity are not empty and/or retrograde rhetoric), where for once nationalism—in the face of imposed conformity to rules, procedures, and values intended for permanent political-economic subjugation—acts historically as a progressive social force. Supra-nationalism, candy to the idealist, turns out to be rotten, and is workable, worthwhile, and just, only when it is equalitarian in structure and substance, which the EU is not. Today, small riots, as the gap widens between citizenry and politicians; tomorrow, with other nations in the EU watching events in Greece, and facing similar if not identical circumstances of deprivation, perhaps they too—Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland—will take to the streets and proclaim No to austerity, as increasingly the viper's nest of fascism.

I hear pebbles loosening in the base of the EU edifice, which is ever so slowly shaking. Yet it takes little, one or more false moves, for the ground itself to rumble. Avowed declarations of denying sympathy for those hurt by austerity, Merkel leading the chorus, may register 3.1 on the political Richter scale, but a 5.5 mark is in the cards when the EU professes clearly its identity as the viable political setting for NATO to move ever eastward in confrontation-mode against Russia. The same countries critical of Greece are in the vanguard of anti-Russian feeling. As I've noted elsewhere, Latvia is now the dumping ground for heavy weaponry near the Russian border, with B-52s in the skies. Is this relevant to Greece? Yes, it is being punished less for indebtedness as such than for exposing the fragile character of EU unity and the means used to keep the member nations in line. The psychopathology of militarization has been made a supremely binding agent for economic cooperation, false consciousness carried to lengths Marx never envisioned—hence, deviations, like the Greek referendum itself, must be ridiculed and viewed as un-European and ingratitude. I am heartened, though, by the scenes before the Greek Parliament hours ago. The Greek people have an unquenchable thirst for freedom.

JULY 20, 2015

### **Germanization of European Unity: Source of Industrial-Financial Dominance**

In the 70 years since the end of World War II we have seen, from the American perspective, a complete transformation (i.e., a revised enemies list), in which the former Axis Powers were almost immediately replaced by Russia and China as endangering world peace and US national security. The obsessive hate for communism (even when China and Russia have incorporated significant elements of capitalism into their respective structural systems) has, for America, led to conceiving Germany and Japan as keystone forces in countering presumed communist aggression while supporting America's hegemonic claims to leadership of the world political-military framework. Even this past week, after many intimations, Japan is venturing into the international arms market, while Germany, for some time occupying a position of supremacy of wealth and industrial production in Europe, has, by representing the integration of the EU, strengthened NATO which, in turn, is the spearhead for the confrontation with Russia. The eastward march of the EU and NATO has made the Baltic countries a source for raw materials, a ready market for surplus goods, and—given the very recent buildup of heavy military equipment in Latvia—a staging area for such confrontation, eyeball-to-eyeball, predicated on a strong Germany to foster unity, with America (its long-term geostrategic vision going as planned) looking on.

The EU is designedly supranational, the organization of capitalism at a higher level. This is sophisticated and innovative: capitalism transcending national rivalries in order to present a homogeneous front to the world under a single leader—obviously, Germany (and in the international Great Chain of Being, the US seeking to guide Germany, not always successfully, as the European extension of its own power). To transcend national rivalries, however, may merely project rivalries onto a wider plane, broadly defined spheres of influence, so that capitalist contradictions have not been eliminated so much as suspended, in which the fuller maturation of trading blocs run up against each other in the search for markets. But first comes internal cohesion, in this case the EU and its common currency, the euro, and for this reason, Greece is far more important than Germany and the other members let on. Several countries, Germany in the lead, were prepared to welcome Greece's exit from the EU and the eurozone, but by the weekend with the passage by the German Parliament (July 17) of the first step, approval of negotiations to resolve the crisis (in reality, nothing was conceded, "debt reduction" a euphemism for possible extension of the payment period and/or lower interest rates, and even there no promises), reason prevailed, that is, too much was at stake to disturb the fundamental architecture of UNITY.

Unity, implemented through a supranational framework, was the means of coercion and absorption by Germany of Europe, the common currency having the function of Marx's commodity fetishism in that it serves as the reification of a central integrative basis for defining the European political culture. The euro is a psychological trap: whoever controls it controls wider economic arrangements. One size fits all, no devaluations, no national currencies; its rules both regulate and predominate, the leader, in this case, the economic powerhouse, calling the shots. Here I was intrigued by constant reference, among German leaders, their parrots elsewhere, and the press, that Germany is a stickler for the rules, as though rules purportedly depoliticize economic affairs, render them technocratic solutions and hence above board—efficient solutions, without fear or favor. This is precisely the way austerity is presented. Economics rises above class to pursue the general welfare. (I'll cite evidence momentarily.) Austerity is Germany's strong ideological suit in bringing all other affected nations into line, mandating balanced budgets, a shrinking safety net, the rollback of labor organization, gains, rights, pension cuts, and to be slipped in (ostensibly as a mode, as demanded of Greece, of repayment of debts), privatization of public property. That is what unity is all about, criticism of which faces extreme censure.

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For immediate background, I refer to New York Times reporter Melissa Eddy's article, "Germany's Tone Grows Sharper in Greek Debt Crisis," (July 16), just before the advantages of unity were perceived, not least the consideration that if Greece defaulted and left (or was ejected from) the EU this would set a bad example for similarly situated countries facing the adverse consequences for economic growth of austerity, at least four others gasping for air with high unemployment, decline of living standards, and lower per capita earnings. Unity uber alles, austerity uber alles: Greece must not be allowed to upset the applecart, the wealth of Germany and the half dozen or so other nations on top, and furthermore, a dim realization that Greece out, by whatever means, could lead to the fragmentation of the eurozone and the EU itself. Eddy writes adroitly, the day before the German Parliament's vote: "Despite bitter opposition in many quarters to the austerity-first policies Germany has imposed on Europe's poorer nations, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has hung on to its role as champion of integration on the Continent through

deft use of diplomacy and the country's economic clout." Nothing in fact had changed, Merkel the hard-liner sought approval for negotiating the terms of a settlement without giving anything away and in recognition there remained significant defections in her own party ranks, which persisted the following day in the vote taken.

This posed a dilemma. Merkel and her finance minister Schauble wanted to show no mercy and had no love for Greece, and yet she at least recognized that failure to accept the results of the foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels would subject Germany to criticism and undermine its preeminence in the EU. Eddy notes: "But in negotiating a new deal this week to bail out Greece, Germany displayed what many Europeans saw as a harder, more selfish edge, demanding painful measures from Athens and resisting any firm commitment to granting Greece relief from its crippling debt." Schauble, the day before the vote, was still calling for Greece (if it wanted favorable terms) to exit the eurozone; significantly, when he spoke to the German Parliament the next day, when the vote was taken, he chastised Greece for its ways but no longer mentioned an exit. Actually he hinted twice during the week about a Greek exit, and said on German radio (July 16), "We have not said that we will impose this, we can't, we don't want to, and no one has suggested it, but perhaps it would be a better way for Greece." With friends like that, Greece does not need enemies. Schauble questioned whether granting Greece all that it asked would necessarily help to make the crisis manageable: "Nobody knows in the moment how it is supposed to happen without debt relief, but everyone knows that debt relief is not possible within the eurozone." This is precisely what I meant by promulgating, then hiding behind, the rules, rules whose function was to reinforce the dominance of the stronger party.

For further background I turn to NYT reporter Alison Smale's article, "Germany Votes to Move Ahead With Greek Bailout, but Opposition Grows," (July 17), announcing parliamentary passage of the next stage in the process—the air still roiled by criticism: "German lawmakers on Friday [July 17] approved entering into detailed negotiations for a Greek bailout amid a simmering international debate over providing more debt relief to Athens and [this next is important] intensifying questions about whether Greece would be better off leaving the European common currency." No wonder the demonstrations in the streets of Athens—simmering (?), more like a seething cauldron, yet still without a real Left in Berlin or Athens, to force debt reduction, the proverbial haircut, else Greece's complete break with the EU, the eurozone, and, *mirabile dictu*, NATO itself. Given the provocation, the situation is remarkably quiet. It is as though power, perhaps seen as a runaway process (the effect Germany all the while seeks to create), engenders consent. The foregoing aside is mine, not Ms. Smale's. The vote itself, despite the urgings of Merkel and Schauble, was 439 for, 119 against, 40 abstentions, and in her own bloc twice the number of defections than occurred in February, when Parliament voted on a previous plan for Greek debt relief. In Friday's debate Merkel warned, not passing the agreement would lead to "predictable failure," and, although she doubted Greece's ability or intentions to carry out austerity, she added: "We would be grossly negligent, even irresponsible, if we did not at least try this path." Yet, no concessions had been proffered, and even Lagarde of the IMF, identified with a more moderate approach by admitting that a bailout plan would not work without debt relief, nevertheless "excluded debt forgiveness," mentioning "considerably extending' maturities and the grace period during which no repayment is required, and of reducing the interest rate." Rules are rules, debt forgiveness not one of them.

Finally we have NYT's Steven Erlanger, whose article, "Germany Risks Its Reputation With Idea of Greece Exiting Eurozone," (July 18), does an important service by broaching the topic of German overreach and therefore the coercive aspects of unity and austerity. He begins with Germany's long-term leadership: "For decades, Germany saw its role as the financier and beneficiary of European unity, a combination of penance for the past [which to me is doubtful] and self-interest. The rest of the Continent came to rely on it as the country that could be trusted to keep its great experiment moving forward." (Perhaps this is already Europe, awed by Germany's economic power, and itself in somewhat of a stage of senescence, willingly following the Leader and fully complicit in the arrangement. Among Greece's sins vis-à-vis both Germany and the EU, beyond the threat of default, was the referendum, a slap in the face of unity, the questioning of austerity, and ideologically unacceptable as the challenge to authority.) Yet even being habituated to follow the lead of Germany, hemmed in by the accompanying rules and procedures, can break down when trust is broken and the "great experiment" is seen as a dodgy grab for more power.

This is Erlanger capturing the moment of doubt; whether or not it will last is another matter, given the mounting European resentment against Greece: "But with the handling of Greece's bailout package, Germany is at risk for losing that trust.... By taking what sounded to many as an aggressive, punishing, contemptuous tone toward Greece, the German leadership may have undercut its moral authority.... And by floating the notion that Greece might be better off leaving the common currency, Germany displayed its national interest more nakedly than in the past and made it clear there are limits to its willingness to put European unity first." Well said, except that he may not appreciate the beauty of unity from the standpoint of exercising social control, i.e., the turnabout of Merkel and Schauble before the Friday parliamentary vote, in which they came to realize unity was the way to achieve preeminence and the wisdom about not being so public, particularly Schauble, in their authoritarian leanings. Here Erlanger reminds us that Schauble "has suggested several times that Greece would be better off leaving. He has come to represent, in many eyes, the hidden face of German power. In Greece, he is portrayed as a Nazi."

Critics are coming forward. Erlanger puts his finger on a possible fault line, one I'd add that the Greek situation—its importance—brings out: "It may be too soon to say for sure whether the harsher German tone signifies a turning point in its role within Europe, or if it is the transitory result of circumstances." He cites the writings of Hans Kundnani ("The Paradox of German Power"), who sees that the Greek crisis "revealed a more brutal Germany, embodied in Schauble," and went on to declare: "But we see, with this crisis, a qualitative transformation of the European Union into a more coercive bloc, different from the one the founding fathers had in mind, or even the creators of the single currency. And Germany is at the heart of that." This qualitative transformation, my observation, may well be the fascistization of Europe, for notwithstanding founding fathers and creators of the common currency, benign in purpose as the heavens, it must be said that the EU was conceived at least partly in sin, as the complement to NATO, thus strengthening the forces of confrontation (and making NATO appear less militaristic and warlike in representing Europe). Too, the single currency, angelic concept though it be, is a brilliant stroke in cementing an alliance, at once economic-commercial-financial, and, as the underpinning, the military dimension. Kundnani concluded that the conflict over Greece "took these developments to a new level—a more German Europe and a more coercive E.U."

Other voices of warning and dissent can also be heard. Erlanger cites Francois Heisbourg, referring to “the brutality of the negotiations over Greece in Brussels [which] has damaged Germany’s reputation” in the EU, who observed, “I think the Germans have crossed a line, and it will be very difficult for them to walk it back.” The respected Jurgen Habermas believed that Merkel and her coalition government, yes, which includes the Social Democrats, “have gambled away in one night all the political capital that a better Germany had accumulated in half a century.” Was there a better Germany in all that time, or the systemic and systematic quest for power? Even Habermas may have been wearing rose-colored glasses. He told the Guardian that earlier German governments showed “a postnational mentality.” It is true, as the reporter states, “For much of Germany’s postwar history, patriotism was considered shameful, the German flag was not widely waved,” etc., the change coming, he believes, with Schroder, who “pushed for a more rules-based system, trying to remove politics from economic management inside the eurozone.” Merkel, he asserts, is less a “European federalist” than Schauble, but apropos of the rule-based social order, Erlanger adds: “But in his view federalism means not an open-ended commitment to rescuing neighbors but a willingness to abide by accepted rules.” As for the euro, Schauble “has been a prime proponent of institutions to monitor members’ economic performance and to discipline outliers [i.e., Greece].”

This put Tsipras and Syriza on a collision course with Schauble and Germany because substantive debt-restructuring would be an unacceptable game-changer, the former largely relenting, however, to effect a settlement (much to the disgrace of a hypothetical Left all but invisible). The chorus of rules, rules, and more rules, nominally for their own sake, but really to enforce a power relationship detrimental to working people, the poor, the elderly, the unemployed, seemed everywhere. This is what Heisbourg meant when he said, the Greeks “have been their own worst enemies.” Daniela Schwarzer, director of the German Marshall Fund, explains: “For the moment, blame is put on Germany, but the Germans believe that the Greeks were not playing by the rules. Merkel now has a double fight—at home [the support of Parliament]... and in Europe, where she will still have to show power to make sure the Greeks keep their commitments and play by the rules. The whole euro system depends on that.” She couldn’t be clearer. Erlanger paraphrases her thinking: Rules, “economic strictures and a strong central bank are best in order to depoliticize the euro as much as possible,” in contradistinction to France and Italy, which believe that “politics is there to define policy, especially budgetary and economic policy.”

Perish the thought, politics as code for the democratic, as opposed to alleged technocratic, determinant of public policy! Here we cut to the chase: rules, by Germany’s (and many other government’s) apologia for policy-making depoliticizes the EU and the euro, when the reverse is true. Rules may sound neutral and nonpolitical (referring to the genesis and administration of power), but one can ask: who formulates the rules, implements them, and with what consequences? Rules define class power, or, projected to the EU, national power as a function of capitalist development. Germany is ahead of the game because ahead of the other countries in industrial-financial growth, which has led to an arrogance that just stops short of the nazification of modernization. Unity is to coercion what austerity is to societal deprivation, a synchronicity making for the mutual advancement of both.

My New York Times Comment on the Erlanger article, same date, follows:

Bravo Erlanger. While European criticism of Germany is known abroad, the topic is not covered in the US. US sympathies always lie with the creditor, and Tsipras's mildly Left government (for it is only that) reinforces the bias. Yet it is questionable that Germany had been motivated by "penance," and rather had pushed its industrial-financial supremacy within Europe for decades. (One wonders at this stage whether reunification was such a good idea.)

Schauble is the true voice of German arrogance, his rule-based society for him all well and good provided Germany defines AND enforces the rules. Unity is a convenience, the better for Germany to tighten its hold on the Continent. And still, the American public looks at Greece as a renegade or spoiled child. I agree with the sentiment that Nazism (Hitler saw to it that the trains ran on time) lurks just below the surface.

What is not mentioned is Russia. For the EU was, is, and will remain a cover for NATO, the political formation having a military foundation. Europe per se, following Germany's leadership, both extends America's global leadership and keeps alive the Cold War. Greece deserves respect for its ordeal, not calumny. Erlanger for the first time brings out that dimension.

JULY 22, 2015

### **America on the March: International Relations Framework**

The war machine grinds on. It is inseparable from the structural-ideological process of US capitalist development, itself a unified historical track in which structure and ideology are mutually reinforcing, the latter more causative, an independent variable unlike in most other societies, because of the way capitalism arose in America. Go back to the inception of the society. America as a fragment of, the projection from, and colonization by Europe, had largely left the institutions of feudalism behind (not however slavery, which, on close inspection, had already assumed capitalistic form—the one institution theoretically premodern that by virtue of having escaped the past had become modern). Absent the feudal systemic-cultural heritage, that which remained in Europe a structural impediment to capitalism, America essentially broke free from history: it was born capitalistic, and did not have to become so. Nor therefore did it have to experience revolution as the means for achieving modal change. This is to say, its capitalism was if not still-born then at least pressed into a mold of finality, a fully-formed capitalism, petrification its inner motif, certain of itself, mature at birth—in conventional terms, Lockean in origins.

Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* developed the argument about the absence of feudalism in shaping American historical development, the result of which, in his view, was a pattern of consensus on fundamental values, a puristic form of capitalism (although he did not use the description) which was linear rather than dialectical and hence was characterized by the comparative lack of social protest in the American past. We were all capitalistic, we were all Lockean, protest itself occurring strictly within the boundaries of capitalism. The consensus formulation is saturated with conservative meaning: no protest to speak of, nothing then to protest against, and America Voltaire's best of all possible worlds predicated on abundance, justice, equality.

This is not the America I knew and studied, yet in the 1950s as an unerring sign of the Cold War and the historiography accommodating itself to meet it, we saw Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* engaged in revising and transvaluing the past into a capitalist paradisiacal bliss in which "radicals" were lost liberals who just more vociferously affirmed capitalism or else, outside the consensus, demonstrably irrational, the source of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, reprehensible, unworthy of further mention. Radicalism had no moral standing in America. (My first professional venture was a scathing critique of Hofstadter's book .) The collection of essays, *The New American Right*, contributors including Seymour Martin Lipset, reinforced the consensus thesis, including discrediting those that did not fit, and somehow the agreed target was American Populism, the term populist itself entering the political vocabulary as a retrograde social force/movement par excellence—to this day. Hartz, on the other hand, was a non-polemical scholar dwelling in the abstract heavens of theory. Yes, his consensus formulation muted or discounted social protest, but in our conversations and as a reader of my dissertation on Populism he was prepared to modify the consensus thesis and credit Populism's incipient radicalism.

Hartz's Lockean construct nonetheless has value because it emphasizes America's preponderant regard for capitalism, which, when taken from there (where he did not go), from every vantage point, especially the ideological, de-legitimizes radicalism, and makes intelligible what concerns us now: the US unilateral pursuit of global hegemony, a quest which step-by-step can be seen beginning in the late-18th century with the American Revolution confirmatory of the nation's non-revolutionary course, and if anything the releasing of mercantilist energies (and corresponding class formation), that by John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine made America an international player in market penetration. In foreign policy, Hartz, though not his interest or intent, may have been entirely right, the single-minded hegemonic thrust into world politics and economics, so that throughout the late-19th century one sees the Open Door as the aggressive statement and practice of market imperialism (a subtle shift from mercantilism to the imperialism of free trade), which under Theodore Roosevelt—and just prior, the War of 1898, again confirmatory, here the next step—becomes the militarization of expansion, including territorial acquisition and the Battleship Navy.

When we thus look around, to say 1910 and thereabouts, America has lost any Innocence it claimed for itself, and with the domestic structure now fully caught up with foreign policy, i.e., the concentration of industry and banking, under TR's Progressive dispensation, business-government interpenetration under the watchful eye of the House of Morgan, the US Coming of Age is more or less complete. From here on out, America can be expected to behave like every world-class imperialist power, except that in place of traditional imperialism via closed trading areas and colonialism, it sought a broadly counterrevolutionary role in international politics, the world open to American trade, investment, raw-materials extraction, and market penetration, all in all, construed to mean, as needed, the meddling in the internal affairs of the countries subject to penetration. No bounds, no limits, inherently expansionist AND antiradical, so that after the coming of age we put a candle on the birthday cake, Wilson's Siberian Intervention for the purpose of destroying Bolshevism. By 1920 and through the further consolidation of American business during the decade of the 'twenties, trade-association activity an important facilitator, the US has taken a major step in capitalist structural-financial advancement.

This historical, developmental placement squarely in the framework of monopoly capital, accompanied and integrated by an unabashedly probusiness ideology so intense and pervasive as to

be identified with 100% Americanism, did in fact fix ideological limits on FDR, the New Deal, and America's response to the Great Depression. At best, the logjam was broken on social welfare and labor policies, and much that I find in the New Deal was profoundly beautiful and commendable, from WPA and the Wagner Act to the Farm Security Administration. FDR, faithful to his Groton principles of Christian stewardship, as well as personally through overcoming the deadening spiritual (but not physical) effects of polio reached out to an American people broken, out of work, dispirited, and instilled hope in them and the future and tried through government programs to restore their vanished sense of dignity: a high water mark in American leadership, an authenticity of regard for the poor, the unemployed, a biracial America, not seen since, in the catalogue of US presidents, a galaxy of mediocrities and, judging from the interventions and wars, worse.

Yet FDR and the New Deal rode the overall dynamic of market imperialism, perhaps more so than had he wanted, due to the exigencies of recovery. But starting with the Good Neighbor Policy, America was in the hegemonic game plan, and also was less than helpful to antifascist popular movements in the mid- to late-thirties. The domestic-foreign dichotomy held even for the New Deal, and to put a not-so-fine point on policy, there was on the domestic side, through the National Recovery Administration, further encouragement of monopolization, carrying forward more systematically (as through code authorities) than TR could hope to realize, the interpenetration of business and government. It required all the work of economic concentration in the 1920s to make effective what followed, an internal business structure not vastly different from European corporatism in Germany and Italy. Thus New Deal democratization, still moderate at best, in its reform and recovery measures cannot or should not blind us to a direction in foreign policy consonant with America's brand of open-trade imperialism and concern for spheres of influence. World War II was as much for Roosevelt and America in the early stages a fight against closed trading areas as it was one directly opposing fascism as such. In the course of the war, postwar planning was aimed at continuing the march toward global commercial-financial hegemony.

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Seventy years have passed, and there has been no alteration of direction. How could there be? The foregoing very brief sketch describes the consistency of imperialist purpose, a continuity of practice only made possible because there have been no internal or for that matter external obstructions to capitalist development—a forward retrogression, if I may, in which development results in closure, greater class-stratification, diminished labor rights, an obviously intrusive social control of the population, all thought to be necessary for the stability of the corporate order and the government to serve its needs. For the public, foreign policy is off limits, in part to ensure a degree of social blindness (i.e., false consciousness) so as not to detect how vital and imperative markets and continued expansion are to the profitability and security of a capitalist system, and more specifically, the extent of intervention and stirrings of war to their achievement. We become soldiers of capitalism, a lock-stepped politics far more consensus-oriented than Hartz ever realized, perhaps because he underrated the consistency of US imperialism as an important structural attribute of the system, particularly its accentuation in America, and the parallel hardening of ideology into place, to supply a repressive cast to individual thought, so as to encourage a patriotic identification with the purposes and goals of business, even if, and especially if, the object of the fervor is the uniform, the flag, war, intervention, all suitable diversions from the ongoing process of increasing capitalist power at home and abroad.



America on the march, never satisfied, seemingly unexhausted, the connoisseur nation because the world is by right its oyster. Most recent, but that is hardly the correct time-frame when in reality the continuity of administrations in foreign policy, suggesting the interchangeability of presidents, has led to where we presently are, Obama is a suave Bush, more effective in extending imperialism while ensuring its military- as well as its market-dimension. Obama is not Metternich, but as an amateur geostrategic planner, supported by a raft of war-professionals, essentially amoral, bloodless, he has a global vision as ambitious as America has seen, and therefore equal to or more dangerous than usual comparisons to Republicans. Party differences hardly matter in this realm. Yet Democrats are peculiar in their desire for accreditation, the proof-positive they crave to be thought 100% American, perhaps in the delusion their domestic policy is so radical as to call into question their patriotism. It isn't: they are counterfeit Republicans with few exceptions.

One could envisage Obama coming on the scene as primarily an empty vessel (like Bush)—whose policy advisors have distinguished themselves in their anticommunist rectitude, ideologues in the vein of Forrestal, Kissinger, the Dulles Brothers, Wolfowitz, to name a few, from such an abundant pool—prone to accept the grandiose message or siren song of America's final triumph over communism by taking on Russia and China together as twin evils to be sliced and diced, weakened, dismembered, converted to the faith (even though, as I've written, their respective social systems possess significant elements of capitalism already). Obama aspires to be of the manor born, a world statesman of counterrevolution, the only kind that seems to gain recognition these days, at least from the American perspective—and to qualify requires undoubted credentials of opposing any and all who stand in the way of US supremacy, a test the failure of which makes one an opponent of America and therefore a communist and fair game for harsh treatment. The ethnocentric breakdown, We vs. they, is the ruling mindset.

The fabric of aggression is finely woven, simultaneous attention devoted in the Obama administration, more so than in his predecessor's, to Europe and Asia as potentially interlocking threats, to be opposed by every available means. The scurrilous phrase, all options are on the table, comes to mind, for Russia, a more avowedly military confrontation, with NATO rubbing up against the Russian border, while for China, for the time being, the military factor is treated more stealthily in favor of commercial-financial encirclement through the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This latter course, however, is not to be taken as a sign of irresoluteness because, embodied in Obama's Pacific-first strategy, the full-scale deployment of military resources underpins the TPP as a highly visible presence. Obama is serious about confrontation. This is low-keyed megalomania, circumspect in order to maximize its deadliness, B52s engaged in joint- maneuvers in Latvia, a veritable armada of heavy seacraft in the Pacific supplemented by aircraft able to deliver nuclear bombs on target. In my recent CounterPunch article on the Germanization of European Unity I may have overstated Germany's power within the EU and its importance to a confrontation with Russia, although I think its role in imposing austerity via the framework of unity on the other members and its lead in setting the conditions on Greece is crystal clear, both factors moreover decisive to NATO's continued existence and assigned military posture as anti-Russian.

Similarly, Japan may qualify, as I see it, as the Asian Germany, their similar historical backgrounds during the 1930s and into the Second World War of fascism (Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, using Japan as the model for Asian fascism, is brilliant and relevant) perhaps accounting for the congruity of purpose and execution, and in the

period since, for reliable partnership with the US in what has been rationalized as an anticommunist crusade. If Germany especially through the EU and NATO stands as a bulwark against Russia, Japan, with TPP and a pattern of militarization behind it also stands as a bulwark against China. These are theaters of war, notwithstanding financial and commercial factors at play in each, with America instrumental in the formation and maintenance of the respective alliance systems, their military complementation, and enlistment in US hegemonic goals, which include the drastic weakening of Russia and China as rivals for world power. Neither Russia nor China, I surmise, is unaware of this, the US, paradoxically, driving them closer together to their consequent strengthening and survivability.

JULY 24, 2015

### **Greece: Political Football of World Politics**

Why so much attention to Greece? Hypothetically, if the European Union were not involved, hardly more than an eyebrow would be raised, the indebtedness not astronomical, the gross domestic product and population of the country comparatively small as nations go, and, unlike 1947, there is no possible contest over its future by the Great Powers—no Marshall Plan doing service to destroy its internal Left forces which allegedly paved the way for Russia's expansion westward. Yet the Cold War continues, the spirit of anticommunism (despite Russia's modifications of socialism and inroads of capitalism) as shrill as ever, so that ideological fervency still underpins the US and West's policies toward Russia, with Putin the evil adversary requiring a total response, lest, ultimately, America itself becomes communized. At least that is the current atmosphere, no quarter given to putative aggression, a stupendous confidence game in reality wherein the containment of Russia is a ratifying step in the globalization of a particular statement of capitalism, American-defined and –inspired, monopolism joined to market fundamentalism and activated through militarism. Uniformity of thought and practice is essential, the necessity for social organization as structured along totalitarian lines, in order to prevent any deviation from the ideological fixation on austerity as the means of achieving economic growth with least deleterious consequences to capitalism itself.

Capitalism is growing uneasy if not panicky; conformity, closing ranks, enforcing discipline, identifying and punishing the enemy, hammering out a compliant social base, keeping class the primary operative category, all follow as an integrated societal package of repression to be applied against any who stand outside acceptable ideological boundaries: blocs of nations, countries, leaders, individuals. The US is at the epicenter of the spread of one-dimensional capitalism, in which wealth trends upward, labor status and earnings downward; culture a source of fragmentation to prevent people from realizing a collective sense of themselves; military budgets to ensure inadequate spending on social needs, infrastructural improvements, and ecological protections; and the ever-pervasive inclination toward intervention and war, to satisfy market ambitions and instill pride of patriotic purpose in identifying with national power, strength-in-armaments, the occasional demonstration of overkill and sadism (the My Lai-syndrome for rallying around the flag).

But what has this to do with Greece, circa July 2015? Everything, I submit. The “cradle of democracy” is rocking the boat. Outside the EU, or if this were the pre-EU era, not many would take notice, Greece a just another banana republic, wrong hemisphere, to be subjected to gunboat

diplomacy. But that is not how matters stand. Totalitarian formations demand obedience to the rules, and when such formations are hierarchical in character, the rules are elaborated and refined at each level of power and authority, in this case starting with the US, with the EU its next-in-line to execute its wishes and broader design (as will the nations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership do the same in Asia, Germany and Japan functionally the same in administering the rules of The Leader), and the EU in turn demanding the compliance of Greece with the rules, if the structural-political-ideological integrity of the formation is to be preserved. Even the slightest disturbance to a totalitarian framework, so rigidly conceived and tightly organized that it is, sends shock waves through the entire system. Up until recently, Greece did exactly that.

No longer; it has submitted, and in submitting confirmed—which is why so much pressure was brought to bear in the first place—the expectations within capitalism that uniformity presupposes differentiation not only between classes but also between nations. What is sacrifice (among the lesser and/or weaker), without hierarchy? Wealth accumulation (and presumed progress), without hierarchy? Obedience (to the rules drawn up by others, the more powerful), without hierarchy? In all three cases—attributes of austerity—Greece is on the receiving end: sacrifice; a decline in wealth accumulation, except perhaps its upper groups, but decline certainly in relation to top-tier EU nations; obedience, servile acceptance, the result of an institutional convergence of pressure. To have resisted the troika and stood tall, is deemed an ideological crime. Creditors want their pound of flesh, whether here as governments or individuals, but neither one is as exorcised by financial liability as both are by rules-breaking, i.e., defying/subverting capitalist principles. Debt-reduction is a no-no, a shattering of the social compact of capitalism, whereas extending repayment time without penalty and reduction of interest rates, both advanced by Lagarde of IMF and thus far grudgingly considered by Merkel and Schauble of Germany, are okay because principle is not compromised.

We see, then, what I might term a massive reaction-formation, a psychopathology of reliance on rules, to the degree that it provides evidence of capitalism having become its own reification in ideological form, a system so inflexible, determined in its moral goodness and superiority, ideologized, that it can no longer figure in Smithian self-interested ways or other shibboleths, leaving only the naked quest for profit, punitive demands for conformity, and the use of force to implement the foregoing. Greece is now termed, I guess, an outlier. The bad news is that it has joined the respectable, to the detriment of its own people. And, regrettably, to the detriment of the world. For until now it had thrown a monkey-wrench into the synchronicity of American power, which was present (to use Acheson's title—to a very different end) at the creation, of the EU, and before that, NATO, the two as arms of the hydraheaded US global outreach, initiating a sequence of events that for the moment comes to a rest in the spotlight on Greece. And to mention briefly, this chain of authority from Washington to Berlin to Athens via the path through Brussels is one of several decisive moves in the American-directed containment, isolation, and sought-for dismemberment of Russia, China next in the bombsight, for which austerity is a convenient cover in homogenizing and expanding world capitalism.

New York Times reporter Andrew Higgins's article, "Personalities Clashing Over How to Handle New Greek Bailout," (July 23), places emphasis on how the critics of Greece, notably Germany, remain insistent, even recognizing the difficulties in the way of full debt repayment, on the honoring of the obligation. On one side we see: "To many Greeks, the debt the country has

amassed is the evil fruit of austerity policies, imposed from the outside, that asphyxiated its economy and trampled on its sovereignty.” (By his word-choice, we can guess where he stands.) On the other side, in stately prose, we see: “Then there is Germany, Greece’s largest single creditor, which treats Greece’s debts as a sacrosanct commitment that must be paid as a matter of law and of principle.” He, however, makes an interesting point as to why “the standoff in the nature of Greek debt.” If one looks at past international negotiations, e.g., “those over money owed by Latin American countries during the region’s debt crisis in the 1980s,” one finds that “the creditors were mostly foreign banks and other investors.” But now, with Greece, the “government’s debt is held mostly by other governments and government-backed institutions like the I.M.F.” Perhaps in this case, rather than the earlier bilateral loan packages, this is a harder nut to crack, institutional stonewalling which, as is happening, Tsipras and Syriza finally chose not to fight.

MY New York Times Comment on the Higgins article, same date, follows:

The EU-ECB-IMF phalanx (Troika) has Greece over a barrel. Tsipras caved too soon, a tougher response possibly could have resulted in both debt reduction and, on timing, some relief sooner than if the Greek Parliament had first to make legislative changes. As it is, Greece is the sacrificial lamb for wider geopolitical goals: a) making austerity integral and universal to the European economy (thus a sledgehammer in curbing social-welfare measures); and b) through tightening unity, giving support to NATO in pressing forward its confrontation with Russia.

NATO is the forbidden topic when in reality EU provides it the cover of moderation and neutrality. Too, the US is seldom factored in, when in fact it is the power behind the throne, buttressing both the EU and NATO and cementing their integration. In all of this, Greece is at the bottom of the totem pole, or if you wish, the political football to be kicked around in order to achieve the coherence and coalescence of joint-US-Troika policy with respect to economic and military objectives.

This is the paradigm for using trade as the Trojan Horse for achieving larger purposes of containment, in Europe, Russia, in Asia, with TPP, China. Market imperialism is bad enough; when the military dimension to policy making is added, we see a recipe for disaster, moving from the globalization of trade to the globalization of war.

JULY 29, 2015

### **America’s Decline: Internal Structural-Cultural Subversion**

Seventy years of identifying enemies has taken its toll. Following World War II to the present, America exhibits the psychopathology of anticommunism, that enemies are everywhere besieging the Fortress of Democracy, when the real Enemy is internal, gnawing at, eroding, democratic foundations themselves a problematic basis for authentic freedom because historically aligned from the beginning with capitalism. Through the New Deal period, there may still have been hope that capitalism could be democratized, a future not yet closed down to the popular representation of an active citizenry open to ideas of business regulation, a vibrant social safety net conceived as the human right attached to the individual per se, and a foreign policy dedicated to peace, non-millenarian or hubristic in scope and orientation, rejecting Exceptionalism as the ideology of

unrestrained ambition and conquest. A different America in every respect from the one we know today, a living hell we've created whose image we have then projected onto others, primarily the Russians and Chinese, but in fact any social movement seeking autonomy and social justice for their nation outside the influence and reach of American dominance.

This is not to say American historical development during the three centuries from John Winthrop to the advent of FDR was sweet innocence incarnate. America was always capitalistic, a fragment of Europe absent its premodern institutional base of feudalism (even American slavery was business-oriented first and foremost, the dripping magnolia hiding the dark secret, except to master and slave alike, of profit in the international market). The decks were cleared for expansion: for honing a capitalistic entity which demanded ideological absolutism; a compliant, degraded labor force, agricultural and then industrial; a polity riddled with division, both racial and class, to prevent common awareness of exploitation and the solidarity needed to oppose it. Yet the indivisibility or interchangeability of capitalism and America was bound to be shaken up, less by reform (always within acceptable ideological bounds) than by the social protest of working people and their, along with depressed minorities, whether native blacks or recent immigrants, wider yearnings for a decent life beyond sharecropping and the factory whistle.

Oppression, seemingly permanent and limitless, can last only so long before a thirst for dignity and well-being reveals underlying structure for its atavistic, anachronistic, and for Marx, contradictory, character and record. Apologists for capitalism among American academics and the intelligentsia, the one-way ticket to fame and fortune, have distorted that character and record so as to read "consensus" seeping from every pore of the body politic. Not so! From slave revolts to industrial strikes, the dispossessed in America have fought back, largely however, only to be crushed as permissible alternatives to historical development have been structurally and culturally narrowed. Call it false consciousness or brainwashed but the spectrum for the articulation of oppositional ideas, and the protest to be derived therefrom, has become shrunk through time (aka, repression, soft and hard) to the point that the more militancy is expressed the more self-delusional because avoiding confrontation with capitalism itself. Possessing systemic awareness if still possible is becoming decayed, protest becoming fragmented, as militarism and monopolism, cemented together in defining the future, take hold in a framework of closure.

Too pessimistic a forecast? Let's briefly consult Marx, who had a visionary clarity when it came to the rock-bottom element of capitalism. I refer not to revolution as the offspring of repression, reification as the status of reigning concepts within capitalism, but the simple primordial systemic core: commodity structure and its political-social as well as epistemological function. The significance of the commodity in Marx's analysis was first brought to my attention by Fritz Pappenheim, whom I was privileged to know and learn from in the latter 1950s in Cambridge, Mass. Pappenheim fled from Germany, was interned in a Spanish concentration camp, and through the intercession of Paul Tillich came to America, publishing *The Alienation of Modern Man* (Monthly Review Press, 1959) based on Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, and hence the commodity-structure of capitalism. Most people know Marx from the *Manifesto* or *Das Capital*, yet, for me, the *Manuscripts* represents the seminal, explosive value of his writings, the critique of capitalism at its most fundamental level. Some examples suffice to indicate the power of capitalism to shape social relationships resulting in the political internalization of a mindset which enforces separation and alienation, treats the self and others as commodities, mere objects to be

bought and sold, in sum, the objectification of human consciousness in defense of capitalism's essence, exchange values as the cornerstone of social organization and individual identity. Humankind is thus a form of property, those within society relating to each other as, and through the institutional nexus of, property wherein we are all buyers and sellers (what's in it for me?) giving only a small part of ourselves to others as though inhabiting a transactional framework of profit and loss.

Marx has said it far better than I, appropriately starting with the worker qua commodity, a factor of production, in the process depersonalized as an extension of the machine with no more personal worth to ownership, even less, than the machine. Marx before/different from Freud has the psychodynamics of dehumanization at the base of civilization, or in this case capitalism. It is this pathology of the human condition, an epistemology of narcotized servitude governed by the structural principles of exchange-value, that I think has greater importance than the revelation of exploitation to be Marx's contribution to the critique of capitalism. Revolution, well and good, but what if one mode of production is simply replaced by another, the factor of alienation not directly addressed? Socialized production will lessen inequalities, to be sure, but Marx is after bigger game, psychological as well as economic and physical emancipation, a valuing of human worth truly human, not dependent on the sacrifice of the faculties and emotional life of the individual for presumably higher ends, notably, profits, systems of authority, social differentiation founded on property and wealth.

Let's look, then, briefly at the section "Estranged Labor," *Die Entfremdete Arbeit*, in which he writes: "The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity —and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally." And he adds, in a familiar passage: "This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces—labor's product—confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification." This realization under capitalism "appears as loss of reality for the workers," a form of "object-bondage" in which we have become our commodities. This applies not only to the assembly line but to all of us, that epistemological matrix, what I might call, the materialization of the self, and for Marx, alienation.

The critique of capitalism is unanswerable, for riches impoverish society and individual alike, not only in class terms, but impoverishment of mind and spirit, where there is little intrinsic meaning, intelligence is translated as besting others, and for those reduced in circumstances, a dedication to their own negation through identification with the false dreams enticing them to conformity in an alien existence. This is perhaps not the locus, for Marx, of false consciousness, but one can see here, the worker as prototypical of everyone, the makings of mental regimentation as necessary to commodity fetishism and submission to the structural workings of capitalism. The autonomous individual is not wanted. For who in her right mind wills herself a slave to consumerism, or worse, who identifies herself with the glories of war and subjugation of others? Marx states: "The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but

to the object.” (We are our cars, our bank accounts, everything but ourselves.) He continues: “The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.” I invite the reader who has not done so, to probe deeper into this critique. I would only add, man as a species-being must not treat himself or others as a means to life rather than life itself, for the individual, “a universal and therefore a free being.”

My departure point was what appears as the necessity of identifying enemies both as a way of fending off self-criticism and of projecting onto others the fallacies, psychodynamics, and hatreds we share in our pursuit of global hegemony. Hence, the perpetual Cold War justifying large arms budgets, mutual security pacts for counterrevolutionary purposes and also masking American unilateralism in the world, and not least, marshalling support for war, intervention, the imposition of patriotic ritual at home. Only when one takes account of our self-manufactured fears, a Commie under every bush, Russian missiles descending from the heavens, China swallowing Asia with the US next, does it become evident America is in a state of decline, the national mood that of wanting to have a certitude of moral supremacy over all others which nevertheless, deep-down, is recognized to be beyond our reach. Foreign policy would supposedly arrest the decline, which in the first place can never be admitted, making the militarization of capitalism the more imperative, stripping away any pretense, except to Americans themselves, of a democratic society devoted to peace and social justice.

AUGUST 3, 2015

### **Moral Consequences of War: America’s Hegemonic Thirst**

Like any sane person, I value life. But what if my country, bent on world domination, does not—or rather, does for itself and, somewhat, “friends and allies,” yet in the process distorts its meaning as integral to its very nature? What then? Life is a universal (I think of Kant’s categorical imperative applied to politics), not deniable to others while affirmed only for oneself-country-system of economy, as has happened in the US. Simply, harsh as it sounds, when America brings death and misery to others, it deserves to suffer the same fate itself. If there is world conflagration, there should be no exceptions to the excruciating pain and violence. This is not an academic proposition. We are already close to that point, and have been for some time.

I blame capitalism for the plight of humanity; no, not the abstract political economy of textbook fame, where in other societies there is a historical-cultural mix to mitigate its worst features and mitigate its voracious appetite. But America is different; unlike any other society in its historical development, America has known of, and experienced, little breadth of structural alternatives which might question or soften the deification of profit, accumulation, and the militarization of total resources to safeguard the two. Capitalism in extreme form, pure, undiluted, is in the bloodstream of every American, even among dissenters and those in active struggle against the system as they know it. The result (for those who are numerically few to begin with, more so now than ever) is to strike out at peripheral issues instead of the central core (as though an additive process of good

works will in fact transform the system, and not reinforce its hold even more). Our best, well-meaning to the bone, is not good enough.

I respectfully dissent from the current state of the Left in America. It is relatively easy to sustain a criticism of domestic policy, so pervasive is the scope and extent of injustice. But however penetrating and deep, domestic criticism cannot jump the wall to foreign policy, where, I hold, the gravest danger to freedom lies. CP writers have caught on to Bernie, a foreign policy as vicious as anything the Executive, Joint Chiefs, and Pentagon could come up with, yet do not recognize the interrelatedness of the two: domestic policy is only as good as foreign policy allows it to be, basic change, humaneness, systemic equality all hemmed in by what proves to be America's guiding principles of capitalist development and expansion. We must stretch our moral horizons before it is too late. For every person murdered in Charleston, or now practically anywhere in the US, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, are murdered by this nation, whether by war, intervention, drones, covert operations, or the legitimized violence through aggressive trade-and-manufacture policy of reducing living standards and conditions wherever America's global economic penetration takes place.

Perhaps the most recent case in point: the Trans-Pacific Partnership, representing a power-grab for the largest US corporations ensuring their political and legal protection overseas, and thus, internally, a key instrument for domestic wealth concentration, strengthening the forces of reaction and circumscribing still further the boundaries of permissible social change. Yet that only scratches the surface. For what is TPP without the Pacific-first strategy, the so-called "pivot" in which military forces are being transferred to the region as, now, the principal war theater, less to protect American trade and commerce (gunboat diplomacy in the good old days) but, far more dangerous and provocatively so, to encircle and reduce the power of China, using trade, beyond markets, as the basis for cementing military alliances, already through joint-maneuvers and, like NATO in the West, shaping a coalition for military action? Yes, let us expose the Donalds and Bernies, and the Harridan of War, Hillary, America's Madame Chiang Kai-shek, in our midst, but it is the unified structure of power, its tentacles reaching into every corner of American life, which most deserves our attention.

Can we do both? Of course. Should we do both? Of course. Any revelation of injustice and wrongdoing reflects on the rottenness of the societal core, but the connection has to be thought through and spelled out. Capitalism dehumanizes America, breeds false consciousness in the epistemological foundations of the society, where thought and understanding are grounded in and thus filtered through the commodity system and resulting commodification of the individual. Recently here I quoted from Marx's Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, to suggest the basis for moral emptiness in a puristic capitalist society, chiefly, our own. Even as radicals we affirm an America that debases us and all others. What if America, as we know it, is beyond redemption? I'd hate to think that, and perhaps a start to constructive change lies in the recognition of capitalism's absolutistic proportions in America. Where is that absolutism most felt and found? Racism, gender discrimination, ecological spoliation are simultaneously determinative and yet symptomatic of the far more insidious cancer of a foreign policy historically run amuck while our attention has been directed elsewhere, to the rectification of undoubted wrongs brought about by the inner logic of a capitalism free to realize its maximization of stability, security, and exploitation. It is that inner logic which must be addressed, the mentality of conquest, self-commending because



identified with the traits, goals, desires, inhering in the absolute, which, by definition, can do no wrong.

To return to the starting point, if we bring havoc on the world, do we have the right to exempt ourselves from its effects? By consenting to the overwhelming complexion of the American polity, its militarism, seen from every angle, its military appropriations, its rancid contempt for the poor (and consequent valuing of hierarchy), its suicidal treatment of nature, its arrogation to itself of whatever it believes is to its self-interest, its flag-worship, etc., etc., etc., for the examples are limitless, we demonstrate how our consent is really complicity in the commonsense meaning of evil, that which brings sorrow and distress upon humankind—to which might be added, extinction.

AUGUST 6, 2015

### **A Practical Guide to American Fascism: The Psychopathology of Liberalism**

Republicans are the designated whipping boys for Reaction covering a wide swath of political culture, thought, and activity in America. The content is obvious, summarized as the militarization of advanced capitalism as it seeks to maintain its unilateral course of global supremacy, the effort breaking down in a world of decentralizing power relations, and thereby forcing America to ever greater extremes of action in order to keep its place. The strains are showing: an integral racism in the historical-national mindset quiescent for a time and now once more erupting; worldwide covert operations and meddling in others' internal affairs, ongoing since the 1940s but now so regularized and done with impunity and urgency as to be hardly noticed; the use of trade as a battering ram for geopolitical/geostrategic purposes to shape the hegemonic balance-of-power with respect to China and Russia, while serving notice on US partners of forcible financial-commercial penetration, so that all alike are destructively affected; in sum, quick on-the-trigger hammering out of a stable ideological environment for America's true spirit of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, consciously and unconsciously working on behalf of a corporatistic system of widening differentials in wealth, power, racial and ethnic superior-inferior rankings, a tightening of the screws on patriotic conformity, all of the foregoing wrapped tightly around the intensive concentration of business and banking power into amoral unrestrained monoliths based in or using America for protective cover.

This is the crucial societal phenomenon, a capitalistic polity showing no mercy to real yet often imagined adversaries, domestic critics silenced through self-castration and habituation to a submission to power via consumerism, bread and circuses, and—with massive surveillance—instinctive fear, and on the world scene, nations suitably awed by a nuclear arsenal second to none and, hinted strongly, ready for use, so that the US pre-eminence taken for granted enlists the support and acceptance of the American public, regardless of party. In one sense, Republicans have had a bad rap, Democrats being equally if not more responsible for unleashing the structure, planning, and energies of militarized capitalism. Obama is the perfect embodiment of the American comprador, a black president, an added convenience to liberals in sanctioning policies of intervention, conquest, and at home corporate consolidation (all of which he has exemplified as well if not better than any president in memory), his compradorean stature earned as the intermediary for the American war machine, foreign policy establishment, and as the mock-regulator of the business system, the seemingly benign, because of race, representative of America's ruling class—yes, despite liberals' denials, a ruling class to which some are members and others gladly serve.

So, we proudly proclaim our Americanism, Republican and Democrat, world-beaters, a happy consensus of exploiters, even or especially of our own, the message being one of pride taken that, as citizens, many of us can also be victims of the systemic processes used to subjugate others. We are grateful to serve our masters Leviathan/Mammon, a rare privilege for this “two-fer” allegiance. But as for enemies “real yet often imagined,” we should not blanch from the obvious: some are real; America is hated, perhaps not universally outside its boundaries, then certainly where regime change has occurred, boycotts and embargoes have resulted in intense social misery, native habitats destroyed, military bases erected both for offensive operations and shoring up friendly domestic governments, outsourcing imposed coercive labor conditions and arrangements, in short, wherever the imperium has flexed its muscles, usually the business and military communities in the driver’s seat. Still, even “real” enemies are worn in American inner circles as a badge of honor, testifying to the efficacy of power and deity-endorsed Exceptionalism. Where the “often imagined” comes in concerns the psychological projection of aggression onto others that we harbor for them. Russia and China are not about to destroy America. Perhaps one-tenth of our belief in that outcome derives from guilt, that narrow window of recognition of harm done the rest of the world; but so much of the aggression manifested toward them is power politics with an ideological cutting edge betraying varying degrees of awareness that advanced capitalism has leveled out and has begun its descent into what Marx might have seen as implosive contradiction but, in the hell-bent aim of unsullied survival, might simply be termed, we—or nothing, and let the world come crashing down.

Liberalism here is political psychopathology carried to Everest-heights, an utter sham, unworthy of even the possessive individualism Macpherson so well described emanating from a Lockean philosophic base. Our liberalism is warmed-over market imperialism zipped up militarily to stabilize a world order in which counterrevolution becomes the modus operandi to stave off decline—the more gargantuan the military forces the more safety we feel. Every push for democratization, incremental or large, is perceived as a mortal threat. The problem is, the world can’t wait on our neuroses, actually, psychoses, after seventy years of stirred-up anticommunism which has taken its toll of shifting the political-ideological spectrum rightward. Greetings, 2016: a leadership choice so pitiful, reactionary, confrontational as to provide a macabre shadow over the land. Pity the Republicans, they do not enjoy a monopoly on war-preparation and feelings, a subservience to wealth, despicement of the environment, etc. Democrats will do in a pinch, if not already crowding them out.

AUGUST 10, 2015

### **Crocodile Tears, Notwithstanding: Pathologic Israel**

*If CP readers have not already, please read John Wight’s hard-hitting The Murder of Ali Saad Dawabsha, a Palestinian Infant Burned Alive by Israeli Terrorists, July 31. I take a slightly different approach. – Norman Pollack*

All of Israel is responsible for the horrifying death by fire of 18 month-old Ali and his father, an act not of an extreme religious fringe but a collective nihilistic atrocity of a society whose presumed zealotry on behalf of God disguises bottomless hatred for humanity outside its self-imposed boundaries. The terrain of its identity is not heaven but earth, God used promiscuously and advantageously to justify barbaric practice in affirming its own superiority. Even now, small

gathering in Zion Square, no nationwide protest to demand the removal of the government and Netanyahu—of course not; perhaps fortunately, because whatever would take their place would be still worse, more hateful, exclusionary, the raw meat of militarism capable of the bombing of Iran, ethnic cleansing of the West Bank, criminalizing whatever little dissent is left.

What a horrible blight on Judaism, an ancient world religion which has brought my family the comfort and security of a loving God, One who instills hope in the poor, the downtrodden—not just Jews but all who suffer under repression. I would have thought the Nazi experience, among the cruelest, inhumane in history, had taught a permanent lesson, especially to Jews, but really to all peoples, about persecution of others, its evilness per se. But I find I am wrong; the world has grown increasingly hostile to human rights on every continent, joined by the amassing of power. Still, this is hardly pretext for what Israel is getting away with probably from its inception (although I was too young at the time to catch on). The murder of young Ali, and the night before, 17-year-old Shira Banki, in which we see the breadth of ethnocentrism, the interconnectedness of gay rights and Palestinian autonomy on the part of a fear-driven society, fearful not of the outside world but of the presumed enemy within.

Yes, Tel Aviv, unlike Jerusalem, has a swinging night life, yet Shira's murder also did not arouse national anger, and, truth be told, so deep is the allegiance to a repressive state, gays, whether or not intimidated, did not come out in protest against both of the murders. Ali and Shira, both victims of Israel's own diseased interior hegemony, speaks volumes about how much Israel blasphemes Judaism, stretching now across the ocean to interfere with and sabotage the nuclear treaty with Iran, itself having only a slight glimmer of fairness given Obama's consistent record of foreign-policy confrontation, intervention, etc., on behalf of US global supremacy. When even a Rightist administration's chicanery and use of power politics isn't good enough for Israel, we can see how far Israel has shifted rightward on the political spectrum. And now American Jewry appears to follow in lockstep, AIPAC and its network of supporters more vociferous and vocal perhaps than ever.

It was not always thus. In the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American Jews were known for support of two things, the arts and radicalism, both often joined and enjoying the respect of the Jewish community, reaching even to the upper-middle class, as in the case of participants in the Mississippi Freedom Summer. No longer, blind devotion to Israel translating into Adelson-style politics at home, carte blanche for Israel's demand for absolute conformity in Israel, steady pressure on America to pursue a world course of militarism not irrelevant to the rise of Al Qaeda and ISIS, and the restructuring of the global framework to ensure Israel's security interpreted primarily to mean the weakening of Left governments in Europe and suppression of indigenous radical social forces in developing countries. Israel and the US: joined at the hip in instinctive counterrevolution, the world's apathy about Israeli outrages to be explained in part by the nuclear warfare both countries represent. This, too, from my perspective, is a defamation of Torah, little mediocre persons acting like God Himself, their followers worshipping mega-tonnage of bombs rather than the Golden Calf.

Where will it all end? My lost Judaism may never be restored. Proudly working class and proletarian (even when outside either), proudly integrationist, proudly progressive as in supporting a whole range of organizations, campaigns, strikes, proudly as writers, actors, composers, putting their talents to work in the fight against intolerance and bigotry, and in the fight for solidarity and

brotherhood. I write with tears because so much beauty and social decency is disappearing from our lives as a nation, as Jews, as individual human beings—for what? For a reversion to fascism, seemingly unstoppable, with America and Israel in a far from negligible role in bringing it about. There will be more Alis and Shiras, more crocodile tears, further repression, the Israeli populace averting their gaze so as not to come to terms with the evil they have created. Is there any longer a Jewish conscience?

AUGUST 19, 2015

### **Rapprochement in Havana or Intended Regime Change? America's Kiss of Death**

Opening the US embassy in Havana is a transparent effort at stifling/arresting the Cuban revolution as it consolidates its domestic achievements and transitions to a more stable Latin American setting, one no longer tyrannized over by American financial-commercial-military dominance. This is not the 1960s. Cuba is not alone in the region. US intervention has to be less blunt, more crafty, though still insidious in its hatred of a free people creating their own society. (What I saw a decade ago has not changed, a world-class medical system, people whether in the cities or in the mountains with dignity and strength written on their faces, children at the center of the social system.)

Considering US efforts to isolate and punish Cuba over the last half-century-plus and the tendency of any revolution to stabilize often at the expense of its inner vision, I think that Cuba in world historical terms has done well for itself, much to a gnashing of teeth in Washington unused to resistance of this quality and kind. Why couldn't the little varmints behave, so we could have Batista-like fleshpots, agribusiness and mining investment, and supply an abundance of arms to put down labor agitators, opposition political figures, and incipient revolutionists? The demonization of Fidel, worthy of the present demonization of Putin, confirmed in 1959—not that by then a confirmation was needed—America's global counterrevolutionary role. Cuba must not be allowed to happen. Yet it did, proximity to the US all the more intolerable.

From those early days we see already the interior mental workings of the proto-fascistic mind, a built-in domino theory and effect in which failure to stop Cuba in its tracks will have Cuban hordes invading Miami (ironically, the ultra-Right rather than the Left, and less an invasion than seeking protection and companionship of Americans having the same ideological persuasion), so that a toughened-out posture was absolutely necessary if the US was to save face in the remainder of its world military/business adventurism. If Fidel were to be allowed to succeed, America would suffer irremediable damage both as a unilateral power source and in the eyes of its imperialist colleagues. Hence, under Kennedy, the Cuban missile crisis shortly thereafter—yes, saying goodnight to our young son and the babysitter as we went off to a concert in New Haven, not knowing whether we would see them alive again.

US presidents play for keeps, all the more testimony to the tenacity of the Cuban people to have survived (and continue to) in the face of pressures few others, notably Vietnam, have been able to withstand. The Yankee Colossus shaped the future of Latin America for quite some time—e.g., dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, along with Central American death squads, CIA and other covert activities rife throughout—yet Cuba remained free and comparatively unbloodied. Why expect any change now, precisely when the US is on another international rampage, prepared, in the

same suicidal mindset exhibited by Kennedy, to see to completion the staring down, isolation, and dismemberment of China and Russia? Obama and, regrettably, Kerry, who carries water for him, have emerged, even more than their predecessors, as world-class spoilers, spoilers of a democratized global structure in which the impoverished and disadvantaged masses, brought to that plight largely through US actions, provide illustration and warning of what to expect following today's ceremony in Havana. With regime change the dominating political instinct and policy framework of the Obama administration, one sympathetic to the Cuban revolution and the Cuban people can only urge caution—and a thorough awareness of America's past conduct and future direction.

America will not lie down, particularly given its humongous military investment and corresponding now bred-in-the-bone militarism, and watch the world power system become decentered, nor relinquish its own hegemonic global aspirations, still less sit idly by while its structure of advanced capitalism face unaccustomed challenges in world financial and commercial markets—and internal parasitic-exploitive mode of economic growth proving destructive of growth because the breeding ground for unemployment and rising poverty. When in trouble, the age-old imperialist wisdom is, Project Outward, postpone if not dissolve contradiction through a forcible market penetration and parallel campaign of diverting the attention of the masses to that end. Cuba is a test case in contradiction-resolution, an exercise in ego-building (aka domination) through the politically sadistic pleasure of bashing the weaker party, especially rewarding when done in the name of peace.

New York Times reporter Michael R. Gordon's article, "Kerry to strike Delicate Balance in Havana for Flag-Raising," Aug. 14, is, like Kerry's remarks, hardly balanced for he writes that the Kerry visit "reflects the balance that the Obama administration is trying to strike between working with an authoritarian government and supporting Cuba's beleaguered dissidents." Not much wiggle-room here for crediting the integrity and gains of the Cuban revolution, Gordon portraying Cuba as a totalitarian regime, period. And Kerry is not much help, specifically calling on Cuba to facilitate and encourage Cuban capitalism, as in "the president has taken steps to ease restrictions on remittances, on exports and imports to help Cuban private entrepreneurs," or again, "we urge the Cuban government to make it less difficult to start businesses, to engage in trade," or, as he notes, in an off-the-wall view of the economic embargo, that both parties need to make concessions: "the embargo has always been something of a two-way street. Both sides need to remove restrictions that have been holding Cubans back." As though, somehow, Cuba has inflicted equal pain on the US.

Gordon, alert to the nuances of Kerry's address, deplores Cuba's alleged recalcitrance on the embargo front: "Many of the steps that the United States is taking to encourage political and economic change here [tacit if genteel admission of regime change on modal economic lines] will fall short unless the Cuban government makes reciprocal moves." The Cuban policy is one grand recitation of encouragements: the policy "encourages telecommunication companies," "also seeks to encourage entrepreneurship," and "seeks to encourage financial transactions between the United States and Cuba," in all three cases demanding changes in Cuban policy, as in commissions on changing dollars into pesos.

Where US rhetoric founders in self-serving bathos is when Kerry declares, "Cuba's future is for Cubans to decide," and then, steeped in layers of coded meaning, he goes on: "the people of Cuba would be best served by a genuine democracy [i.e., once for all an end to Fidel and Raul, and open

to US NGOs' funding and influence], express their ideas and practice their faith [i.e., a restoration of pre-revolutionary values and the role of the Church as it was, not as, now, under Pope Francis],” etc. When he adds, and “where the commitment to economic and social justice is realized more fully; where institutions are answerable to those they serve; and where civil society is independent and allowed to flourish,” one wonders, on all three counts, what model he could possibly have in mind, certainly not the US, where the commitment to economic and social justice is perhaps at a long-term low since the New Deal, where the responsiveness of institutions to the people is a nonstarter in today's Age of Disconnect, and an independent civil society, free from business dominance and a militarist ethos, is a chimera.

My New York Times Comment on the Gordon article, same date, follows:

To strike a balance between an authoritarian government and beleaguered dissidents: It's gratifying to see The Times's unbiased word-choice. In truth, NYT is back with its correspondent Ruby Phillips in 1959, distorting the news, engaging in polemics, jumping feet first into the Cold War—as it is also doing now.

Allegations of communism back in style, a faithful reproduction of State Dept./Obama policy and thinking. I pray that Cuba enters into these relations with eyes wide-open, for the US obviously has ulterior motives, to wit, regime change, financial-commercial penetration, cleansing Latin America of putative subversion.

What would satisfy the US? My guess, privatization of the health system coupled with corporate control of sugar, and, bringing the Cuban people to their knees, forcing the recantation of socialism. Otherwise, US-Cuba relations will remain strained. Posing a structural-cultural alternative so close to the American shore is as welcome as the plague, for it becomes a reminder of how savage US global policy is, and how unequal the US social system at home.

AUGUST 21, 2015

### **Surveillance, the American Way: NSA-AT&T Cohabitation**

The convergence of power against the ordinary citizen, here via the interpenetration of government and the telecommunications industry, a collapsing of the public and private spheres of authority (it doesn't matter which of the two seizes the initiative, for what amounts to the privatization of repression under the aegis of the State), eviscerates/invalidates the existence of a democratic social order. The American Imperium wears no clothes, a condition at least a century in the making. The present, however, is perhaps worse than ever, from the standpoint of freedom of thought and expression, as witness, in passing, the clear rightward shift of the political spectrum in which both major parties field candidates stopping just this side of outright fascism.

Surveillance is not the cause of this ideological sameness of retrograde posturing, but certainly a contributing factor—one thinks twice knowing his/her emails and telephone conversations are being monitored and stored possibly awaiting further disposition. A society does not require standing armies when self-policing, circumspection, silence will do as well or better. The breadth of political-economic discussion, the entertainment of alternative visions, has shrunk to a point

familiar to anyone living through the darkest days of McCarthyism—or rather, at least then one saw repression for what it was, whereas now repression has become so internalized that the internal checking of views is hardly noticed.

Is America a Police State? I think, yes. Not just in the ordinary sense, where authoritative racism is back in business and local police forces have become beneficiaries of the wider militarization of American culture and technology. For now emphasis is on coming at the people from all sides, like surround-around sound, a sweet narcotic of patriotism and the veneration of wealth (especially for those who don't have it, yet must be encouraged to identify with those at the top if stability is to be maintained), a gentler more accommodating repression which leaves intact but unnoticed further trends toward wealth concentration, corporate rapaciousness, an ever-expanding appetite for global conquest, overt or through market-financial penetration. Each step down the primrose path of fascism necessitates a tightening of structure, an impelling urge toward social control, a fear of leaving any loose ends by which the populace can gain a self-consciousness of purpose. Not a million intercepts per day is sufficient, there must be more, there must be total control. Simply, surveillance on the scale practiced and hedged in by guarantees of impunity is, no other word will do, totalitarianism.

I have often criticized the New York Times for bedding down with status-quo political-institutional forces, instruments, practices in America, but on this occasion—and often on national-security reporting—the paper does itself proud, the reporters Julia Angwin, Charlie Savage, Jeff Larson, Henrik Moltke, Laura Poitras, and James Risen's article, "AT&T Helped U.S. Spy on Internet on a Vast Scale," August 16, a devastating critique of private-public cooperation in the abridgment of free thought. AT&T as the showpiece of Corporate America makes its participation all the more symbolic of, and reaching down into, the militaristic core actuating the total society. (As a general proposition, toss in GM, IBM, Morgan Chase, etc. etc. and you have, in fact, US Inc., a hierarchical polity run on behalf of business and according to its principles, aka The Capitalist State, shorthand for the paradigm of German and Italian fascism.)

The Times article minces no words: "The National Security Agency's ability to spy on vast quantities of Internet traffic passing through the United States has relied on its extraordinary, decades-long partnership with a single company: the telecom giant AT&T." Newly disclosed NSA documents describe the relationship as "highly collaborative" and praised AT&T's "extreme willingness to help." No arm-twisting; even the UN falls within its purview, and also striking is the way AT&T has plowed through the interstices of the law to avoid prosecution: It "has given the N.S.A. access, through several methods covered under different legal rules, to billions of emails as they flowed across its domestic networks. It provided technical assistance in carrying out a secret court order permitting the wiretapping of all Internet communications at the United Nations headquarters, a customer of AT&T."

AT&T is clearly hot to trot, NSA's 'top-secret budget in 2013 for the AT&T partnership [being] more than twice that of the next-largest such program," as "the company installed surveillance equipment in at least 17 of its Internet hubs on American soil," while, in addition, "its engineers were the first to try out new surveillances technologies invented by the eavesdropping agency." Veritably, a sublime marriage of like-parties consummated in Valhalla. The documents were provided by Edward Snowden and reviewed by The Times and ProPublica. When asked to discuss the findings, AT&T, speaking for itself, NSA, and Verizon, replied, "We don't comment on

matters of national security.’” (Stonewalling, as found also in FISA Court decisions and up-and-down the ladder of repression.)

Obama, civil libertarian bar none, reveals his adeptness in utilizing the state secrets doctrine. Verizon “unsuccessfully challenged a court order for bulk phone records” last year; meanwhile, “the government has been fighting in court to keep the identities of its telecom partners hidden.” The reporters continue: “In a recent case, a group of AT&T customers claimed that the N.S.A.’s tapping of the Internet violated the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches. This year, a federal judge dismissed key portions of the lawsuit after the Obama administration argued that public discussion of its telecom surveillance efforts would reveal state secrets, damaging national security.” One secret, I suspect, is fleshing out just what NSA’s Special Source Operations division is up to—Obamaen secretiveness choking off all vestiges of liberty.

As in any national policy driven by hubris (and ego-fulfilling fanaticism), it only gets worse. One NSA program, Fairview, begun in 1985, already established a partnership with AT&T, and led to surveillance on UN headquarters and, as I understand it, the content of the Japanese-American cable, which is operated by AT&T. Too, it played a major role in Bush’s warrantless wiretap program, only days after 9/11, and before others also jumped in. NSA praised it as providing “a ‘live’ presence on the global net,” and a decade later, in “a push to get this flow operational prior to the 10th anniversary of 9/11,” AT&T was “handing over 1.1 billion domestic cellphone calling records a day” to NSA. Not satisfied with such valiant service, AT&T went on to engage in “peering,” an industry term for supplying NSA with Internet traffic that it transmits for other telecom companies. In the words of one document: Its “corporate relationships provide unique accesses to other telecoms and I.S.P.s [Internet Service Providers].” As for foreign-to-foreign traffic, AT&T “gave the N.S.A. access to ‘massive amounts of data,’ and by 2013 the program was processing 60 million foreign-to-foreign emails a day.”

My New York Times Comment on the foregoing article, same date, follows:

So disheartening. One definition of fascism is the collapse, as here, between the public and private sectors, in effect a systemic removal of constitutional safeguards, e.g., the Fourth Amendment, on citizens’ right to privacy. Surveillance was expected in Nazi Germany, not in the Bush and Obama administrations.

A curtain is descending on American freedoms. The health of civil liberties, as when Zachariah Chafee and William O. Douglas defended them, is now long past. More dismal still, this appears to be an unchecked runaway process, neither NSA nor AT&T amenable to public standards and controls. (For those who still vilify Snowden, let this be a lesson.)

The cynicism and smugness of the representatives of government and business on this whole issue effectively raises the question: Is there still democracy in America. Surveillance and democracy do not mix; further, the cancer spreads to other institutions, notably the judiciary. Let Obama puff and preen about leadership; he has proven himself just another Heinrich Himmler. NSA should be abolished. The surveillance program should be abolished. A stockholders’ revolt of AT&T should throw out its corporate officers and those harmed by its policies have recourse to damages. Time to clean out the Augean stables, if America is to claim any constructive—let alone progressive—role in the world.



AUGUST 24, 2015

### **The Trump Phenomenon: This is Getting Serious**

Think Sinclair Lewis's novel, "It Can't Happen Here," or Elia Kazan's film, "Face in the Crowd," which together take us to where we are presently: a twilight zone of fascism-in-preparation, threatening to become more. I am referring to the rise of Donald Trump (Brecht's "Arturo Ui" comes more to mind), home grown, trumpeting today Harrisburg, tomorrow the world! Yet Trump is less important than the American people, who, thirsting for strong leadership, pathetic in their wallowing in contrived fear, brought on by decades of gut redbaiting and subliminally-wrought and manipulative anticommunism, place him on a political-ideological pedestal tokening authoritarian submissiveness. America, not Trump himself, is the primary explanation for his standing.

The political culture is one of uncritical acceptance of war, business, militarism (in truth neo-fascism corrected for eroding Constitutional principles still in place), a long-term historical process in the shaping of a hierarchical capitalist structure, value system, and class relationships. Old Glory is self-immolating, its fabric torn asunder by unreasoning fear (an inflexible societal framework, in essence, counterrevolutionary in scope and substance, because opposed to social change in recognition that property, class, privilege might be questioned if critical judgment were encouraged and allowed to operate freely), and by frustration over obstacles to US unilateral global hegemony. This is not something new, fear being a weapon in the elites' arsenal, permanent, yet trotted out, intensified, when they sense a mass awakening and/or restiveness usually associated with war and its aftermath.

At the time of World War I America witnessed the Palmer Raids and the suppression of the Wobblies, followed by (as if that were not enough) Wilsonian liberalism's finest hour as the progenitor of anticommunism in America: the Siberian Intervention to destroy Bolshevism. But step back earlier in time; anticommunism was invariably a catch-all, a coded expression for the social control of the, labor movement and much else besides, including the justification for aggressive market penetration, the silencing of opposition and dissent on the concentration of wealth and power, and narrowing the bounds of economic-ideological-political legitimacy so that only monopoly capitalism qualifies as a democratic social order.

Pre-World War I, coinciding with the advent of a more mature phase of industrialism and working-class militancy than in the pre-Civil War era, from say 1877 through 1910, witnessed in America a structural and social process of proletarianization not unlike that of Western Europe in the same time-frame. American exceptionalism, a self-serving myth to suggest the transcendence of class and exploitation—an escape from Europe and its ways, is pure malarkey when the correlates of repressing wage labor are factored in, e.g., Pinkertons, state and national militias, union-busting, a political culture which engenders false consciousness among workers, etc. (The only exceptionalism is an exceptionalism of brutality.)

That the following occurred testifies to the historical persistence of repression in America: the Great Railroad Strikes of 1877, covering a wide swath of the country, barricades, loss of life, destruction of railroad property; Haymarket, the response to which, including severe punishment (State-sponsored political murder); the Homestead lockout in which Big Steel flexed its muscles as a preview of what to expect in the industry; and to name one more, the Pullman strike which

showed the abuses of a company town and, like the others, the uneven power relations, exacerbated by the cooperation of government in savagely putting down labor. In passing, Theodore Roosevelt at the time of Haymarket publicly announced that his Rough Riders would welcome the chance to shoot the rioters—"and my men shoot straight."

Since then, the interwar period, there was a major steel strike and General MacArthur's putting to flight, under orders from Herbert Hoover, the Bonus Marchers (former veterans) burned out of their hovels on the Anacostia flats—these two speaking volumes about the breadth and depth of class repression in America. My point, Trump is no aberration, nor, still more fundamental, is he forcing his way into a political milieu pulling the wool over the electorate's eyes. This is a marriage consummated in heaven, or perhaps I should say hell, the same world-view driving both in what amounts to a tango of death.

Trump is as American as apple pie. In addition to anti-radicalism he has tapped into two prime indicators of the American temperament and mind-set: ethnocentrism and xenophobia, the first, in-group dominance as against all others (frequently taking on racial meaning), the second, fear and hatred of the stranger/the foreigner. It is no coincidence that Trump laid down his marker, establishing his proto-fascist credentials so dear to his mass-base by taking up the issue of immigration, a "two-fer" from the standpoint of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, and by its very nature an opening outward to an authoritarian disposition as seen in Theodor Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, where both traits are given importance signifying ego-loss of the followers, their submission to the authority of the Leader, and the surrender of critical judgment in favor of a stress placed on personality. (Trump's descent from the skies in his private plane at the political rallies resonates with the technique used by Hitler—although I do not intend further comparison.)

He appears to be pressing all the right buttons, as is evident from the New York Times article, "Why Donald Trump Won't Fold: Polls and People Speak," Aug. 23, by Michael Barbaro, Nate Cohn, and Jeremy Peters. The reporters take him seriously, as indeed should we. There is nothing to be gained by looking away, again, not only because of his views but also because he reveals the underlying value system, policy premises and principles, and call to action of Americans in increasing numbers. Whether or not he receives the Republican nomination is less significant than that the genie cannot be put back into the bottle. For we are witnessing a more-than-disturbing rightward shift in the political-economic-ideological spectra (they tend to work together in synch, bringing much of the political culture with them).

Barbaro-Cohn-Peters discount Republican efforts to minimize Trump's showing in the polls and attendance at his rallies. Instead, "A review of public polling, extensive interviews with a host of his supporters in two states and a new private survey that tracks voting records all point to the conclusion that Mr. Trump has built a broad, demographically and ideologically diverse coalition, constructed around personality, not substance, that bridges demographic and political divides. In doing so, he has effectively insulated himself from the consequences of startling statements that might instantly doom rival candidates." This is a shrewd assessment, a diverse coalition made possible by concentration on personality and a superb strategy negating his bizarre, outrageous statements. Bizarre? He called some women "fat pigs" and "disgusting animals," yet leads among women, leads among evangelical Christians, "despite saying he had never had a reason to ask God for forgiveness," and so on down the line.

Whence this support? “Tellingly,” they write, “when asked to explain support for Mr. Trump in their own words, voters of varying backgrounds used much the same language, calling him ‘ballsy’ and saying they admired that he ‘tells it like it is’ and relished how he ‘isn’t politically correct.’” The reporters observe, “Trumpism...is an attitude, not an ideology,” the implied vagueness, I submit, making him the more dangerous for it. Summarizing the interviews, “He’s a person who gets things done,” or in the words of a Bay City hairstylist, “We don’t need a politician for president; we need a businessman,” Barbaro & Company have their hands on the collective pulse of the nation, and the more offensive his remarks—even his attacks on party rivals—the more that is taken as evidence “confirm[ing] his status as a unique outsider willing to challenge conventions, and satisfy[ing] a craving for plain-spoken directness.”

Move over Reagan; America has a new Teflon archetype. Even his wealth is seen as a blessing: “In interviews with voters in Michigan and New Hampshire...none cited his policies as chief motivation for backing him. Many pointed, instead, to his wealth, saying they believed it set him apart from career politicians and freed him of the demands of donors.”

My New York Times Comment on the Barbaro-Cohn-Peters article, same date, follows:

Personality is a dangerous variable on which to build a campaign, for by definition it downplays substantive arguments in favor of manipulation and diversion. When Trump’s policies are finally fleshed out, he may in fact become still more popular. Sad to say, Americans have become bereft of nuance, reason, and peaceful intent. Trump’s popularity thus suggests the perfect match of the man, his times, and an electorate desirous of black-and-white solutions to what rather are complex problems and the need for re-directing energies to the basic overhaul of education, infrastructure, health care, and, most important, foreign policy, moving clearly away from war, intervention, and covert action, to a search for true internationalism based on helping and serving, not on domination.

I regret having to say this, but Trump is merely a more candid and refreshing version of the other Republican candidates (and Democrats as well, including Bernie Sanders, whose foreign policy—which is never discussed— is barely distinguishable from the field in both parties). The next presidential election will see the emphasis on more extremism, particularly if those who see through the moral bankruptcy of current politics stay home and refuse to vote. That leaves a large residue of crypto-fascists, the next generation of leaders and followers alike.

AUGUST 25, 2015

### **Gender Freedom and Sexual Liberation: The St. Paul’s School Case**

Gender freedom is a special case of human rights, long overdue, finally recognized; sexual liberation may sound the same, but is very different. It has no standing (as I see it) in human-rights doctrine. This article may well affront CP contributors and readers, for it challenges what over the last half-century and more has been identified with radicalism—and to me suggests a Pop Marxism which diverts attention from and falsifies a democratic social order and the democratization of power. There have been many who have mounted the sexual barricades to (naturally) wide acclaim, such as Wilhelm Reich, but I am familiar with only one deserving my respect, Herbert Marcuse,

who attempted the reconciliation of Freud and Marx in *Eros and Civilization* (and an embarrassing follow-up, in *Essay on Liberation*).

I briefly knew and always respected Marcuse, chiefly for his *Reason and Revolution*, which, along with Leonard Kreiger's *The German Idea of Freedom*, made a serious contribution to the understanding of Marx's concept of alienation (the bee in my bonnet for over a decade, reinforced by my friendship with Fritz Pappenheim, whose less well-known classic, *The Alienation of Modern Man*, deserves a wider hearing). This for starters, because right off the bat one sees since the 1950s, dissatisfaction registered yet not quite actualized as social protest against the stultification and hypocrisy of Western civilization. McCarthyism, the Cold War, these were symptomatic of underlying pressures forcing, or attempting to, a rigid conformity in America, opponents of which gravitating toward the sexualization of Marx as a somewhat easy way of striking back.

Marcuse was more serious than that, but failed to transcend the social context of incipient radicalism, the libido becoming for him the energy field indicating nonalienated self-expression. Psychoanalytic insights (and accompanying jargon) notwithstanding, this I suggest—but not at the time—is a betrayal not only of Marx but also the reality if democratic socialism, working-class emancipation, and a reconstruction of social values were ever to be achieved. Why? In large part because sexuality is not an autonomous life force impervious to social system. It is shaped, i.e., the particular form it takes, by the societal/historical context in which it is found. In America, and the St. Paul's School is a perfect example, in this case reaching down into the person's teens, sexual liberation is one-sided gratification, or to be blunt, simply a mode of domination, integral to the hierarchical structuring of advanced capitalism.

Where Marcuse goes wrong is in failing to recognize that sexual liberation in a setting which, like America, promotes inequality as its systemic purpose and primary engine of growth, can only result in the distortion of human relations, mutuality of any sort denied legitimacy as a step to socialism. Marx had better things to be concerned with, raising living standards via an equitable system of production, the mobilization of a society's resources to meet its people's needs, the peeling away of false consciousness, as in commodity fetishism, so that the individual could discover her/his true self—all of which, until civilization learns to treat every human being with dignity, makes of sexual liberation self-indulgence pure and simple, and reproduces and/or recapitulates in microcosm the very traits of structure and personality which have supported domination and alienation.

Sexuality is not an escape from, but the very mirror of, society. Before one speaks of its liberation, recognize first the degree of its politicization, and under the societal regimen of advanced capitalism what comes to the fore is a command mentality, the equation of virility and machismo, masculine pride, masculinity, and power, an ethos of war and dominance from which condition personhood is meaningless and cruelty, in various degrees of disguise, is present. How therefore does this differ from gender freedom, a cause which on the whole, I will argue, is the progressive embodiment of personhood, although, in ways not entirely anticipated, also furthering sexual liberation as an invidious tool of male dominance.

One's sexual orientation is a personal matter and, provided it does not harm, through taking advantage of, another, whether a minor, one non compos mentis, or in a dependent state on the other, it should not be subject to social, economic, or legal discrimination, and instead it should

enjoy the full protection of the law as part of the constellation of human rights with which each person is endowed. This has been long in coming, and, understandably, both the definition of sexual orientation has widened and agitation on its behalf has at times been off-the-wall. (I am not a fan of exhibitionism and prefer an ascetic cast, which I think conveys greater endurance and determination: Dignity scares hell out of the oppressor because it works to upset expectations of humiliation. But that is only a personal aside, just as I urge football players I've known not to showboat after scoring a touchdown.)

Gay pride is an intermediate step which hopefully a second generation, amicably settled into the social fabric, will not have to demonstrate, acceptance having already followed. The same for permutations on the theme of gender freedom, in all, a status of legitimation testifying to the human dimensions of the social order. But before we turn to the St. Paul's School, I must enter certain reservations about gender freedom and its overlap with sexual liberation in which neither movement or social development is conducive to the democratization of society. First, gender freedom alone: It is not necessarily a progressive social force. Personhood by definition is not one size fits all, but can be infinitely varied. To be gay, for example, is not necessarily a sign that one has a radical position on political economy, foreign policy, or civil rights. Quite the contrary gays often tend to concentrate on the single issue, solipsistic fashion, while going about their business in the mundane workaday world. Interest politics rather than class politics appears the salient element in gay protest. (I say this not in blame, but merely, one must avoid simplistic heroics in order to suit, or wish into existence, a desired profile.) Gays like others are people demographically spread all over the place. Yet they also contribute to a false vision of radicalism and radical possibilities.

Sexual orientation becomes the key marker in the evaluation of social systems—not, specifically as in capitalism and central to its fundamental critique, imperialism, war/intervention, the class system and the rights and conditions of working people (in contradistinction to a concentration of wealth and power), and myriad other interrelated elements from alienation to the reification of ideological themes and material objects. From that perspective, one—i.e., I—would hold back recognition of cultural and legal status, however warranted, until gays themselves joined the comprehensive struggle for human-economic-racial equality and entertained the belief in a socialist commonwealth of law and social justice. That, from my albeit limited observation, is not happening, nor given the trajectory of protest is likely to happen.

Rather, a me too-ism seems to be prevailing, with sexual liberation the antecedent social force (if we can speak of it thusly) breaking ground for gender freedom in its own right. The two have much in common, not the obvious sexual factor, but the apolitical dimension of self-indulgent purpose. Sexual liberation, like gender freedom, is hardly subversive in or to the structure and paradigm of advanced capitalism. Earlier would have been a far different story, for each would be feared as an intractable element undermining work discipline and discipline in general. That does not mean, however, that either at the present stage of capitalist development constitutes a systemic, class, or even cultural threat. Capitalism easily absorbs both, adding insult to injury by commercializing them and using them as evidence of capitalism's spirit of toleration and humaneness. Sexual liberation, in particular, is an ideal diversion, an amusing narcotic which distracts attention and analysis from a sordid national record of high unemployment, intensive capital accumulation, and xenophobic attitudes (complementing exceptionalism) of immigrants and the outside world (except for purposes of investment).

While gender freedom does not rule out a thoroughgoing radicalism, sexual liberation, paying lip service to that goal, leads to the objectification of the human personality, for all concerned, as outlets for gratification and, in masturbation (part of the syndrome), the individual. Is this a plea for abstinence, or some blue-stocking retrograde schema? Hardly, I am merely seeking to disentangle sexuality per se from capitalism, which cheapens and impersonalizes it as it does practically everything else. Sexuality = domination, liberation only meaningful when society rids itself of hierarchy. Otherwise, the system reproduces its internalities, large and small, in every way, most especially its social relationships. Likewise, gender freedom loses its aura within capitalism because it cannot divest itself of capitalistic contamination in other areas of life not directly related to the love-relationship, as in a callousness toward the problems of humanity as a whole.

‘Nuff said. I am sketching the context for the social travesty that has occurred and is occurring at the St. Paul’s School. I say is, because even from this one case study, we still have “senior salute,” which according to the New York Times (Aug. 18) is “a school ritual in which older students proposition younger ones for as much intimacy as they can get away with: a kiss, touching, or more.” In the case before the New Hampshire court, apparently considerably more, the senior, 18 at the time, on his way to Harvard, to study theology, the girl a freshman, 15, flattered to be included in the senior-salute ritual. I do not prejudge the facts in the case, whether there was penetration, consent, fear, humiliation, feelings of degradation on her part (thus far, despite loaded questioning from defense counsel—answer yes or no! planting in the jurors’ minds all manner of lascivious hypotheticals, her testimony appears brave and credible). Instead, I don’t want to lose sight of St. Paul’s institutionalized elitism and arrogance, wherein the charge of rape is swallowed up in the framework of privilege. And beyond St. Paul’s there is the selfsame upper-class swagger of entitlement to power over others, the remainder of society. This does not have to eventuate in individual cases of rape; perhaps worse is the collective appropriation, often secured through military means, of the world’s wealth produced by its working people, a more figurative instance of rape, ongoing and systematic.

St. Paul’s issued this statement (Aug. 17) on its website: “Allegations about our culture are not emblematic of our school or our values, our rules, or the people that represent our student body, alumni, faculty and staff.” No further comment. Still, we have senior salute, we have the key passed on from senior class to senior class of a darkened machinery room gained from a rooftop where the trysts take place, we have the culture of submission, young girls fearful of ruining their reputations, including that of making no waves which might upset classmates or the School.

I am in no position to indict St. Paul’s nor is that my wish, but I can’t help recording that matters were not always thus, the cocksureness of the American elite, the moral opaqueness of those in authority charged with training this elite in their youth—an attitude passed on to them as they take their places in the financial-industrial-political ranks of leadership and the foreign policy establishment. If St. Paul’s was like Groton in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as I suspect it was, none of this culture of privileged promiscuity would be happening today. When FDR was a Groton student, under the headmaster, Rev. Endicott Peabody, the boys led an ascetic life, slept on hard beds, and each night, I believe in the school library, lined up to shake hands individually with Rev. Peabody before retiring. Privilege? Wealth? When Franklin became President and was asked by a reporter to the effect, aren’t you alarmed at all the socialistic legislation you are creating, his reply (again in paraphrase), “Oh, no, for those were Groton ideals.” Could anyone say that today, drawn

from an upper class of tawdry attainment, unmindful of social responsibility, as Rev. Peabody would have it, vacuous as well as vicious, as “senior salute” at St. Paul’s indicates so well? When the School has no further comment about the current trial, we know what to expect from America’s elite.

AUGUST 27, 2015

### **The Political Culture of Rape in America: Further Thoughts on the St. Paul’s School Case**

No, St. Paul’s is not America (as suggested in the title), nor is it of the one per cent, or the one-tenth of one per cent, but perhaps of the one-twentieth, a spectacular leap into the empyrean of elitist structure and values, in which restraint on asocial behavior is bad form and without resonance. F. Scott Fitzgerald had it right when he said, the rich are different from the rest of us. That remains, however, a simplification, because capitalism—the elephant in the room seldom mentioned—requires the stabilization and pacification of the lower social orders if it is to be secure and presumably productive. The rich may be different, but not unmindful of their prerogatives, chiefly, beyond the urge for profits, the social control of the underlying populace and, in choosing policies, including war and intervention, cultivating appropriate ideology and values to their rulership transmitted downward to society as a whole.

No, this is not an indulgence in conspiracy theory on my part (like the charge of anti-Semitism whenever one criticizes Israel, the charge of conspiracy theory is the knee-jerk reaction to criticism of capitalism), but rather an indictment and a reminder, the first because there is a systemic sheltering-effect capitalism provides its patrons, the second, the need to pinpoint the locus of power in America, its chosen path of the militarization of expansion and capitalism, and its inordinate power in setting the ideological agenda (what I termed, transmission downward). St. Paul’s, as expected, is toughening its response to the case of alleged rape (I deliberately do not pass judgment on the case as currently known, but must say at the outset that the young lady bringing charges, particularly in contrast to the school administration’s stonewalling thus far, has shown courage, intelligence, poise under very difficult conditions of cross-examination. She was 15 at the time, now 16, a veritable Joan of Arc acting against the Establishment).

Why my interest in the case? America has been in the business of internal domination since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century with respect to the indigenous peoples, and in the 19<sup>th</sup>, with more substantial urbanization and the large influx of immigrants, toward the latter years, from Eastern Europe, taking overt form as social control of the mass population, already suppression of bitter labor strikes, and xenophobic cries for immigration restriction, forcible assimilation, and 100% Americanism. In other words, we have by the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US as we know it (if not in technology then certainly in terms of power), a societal context of hierarchical structure corresponding to and reflecting the concentration of wealth of advanced capitalist development. This was a potent start, a threshold point for the systemic formation of authoritarianism, because, under the pregnant label, “Manifest Destiny,” justifying imperialism and global market expansion, joined to Admiral Mahan’s paean to Sea Power (immediately implemented upon assuming the presidency by Theodore Roosevelt’s Battleship Navy), we see corporatism (e.g., Cassatt, Carnegie, Pullman, and Morgan, faces of business-financial giantism) and wealth concentration as well

established preparatory ground for the militarization of capitalism, elite predominance in opinion formation, and a settled attitude from the top of anti-labor/anti-radical sentiment.

America had turned a corner steadily in the making over two centuries of heightened capitalism (the Civil War as confirmatory, wiping off the historical agenda pre-capitalist elements and thereby more greatly uniformitize the system, opening new areas for investment and exploitation whilst still keeping down the former slaves on racial-economic lines), unlike capitalist development elsewhere, having experienced centuries of feudalism and possessing a rich cultural heritage, thus blunting an unrestrained capitalist impulse, to become a purist version of capitalism unique in its historical-structural-ideological formation ready to take off the gloves in the world and keep order at home. Here the St. Paul's School case is of course a speck on the total historical landscape, but it is from such specks—and they are all around us—that the true spirit and inner workings of the society are revealed. The corner turned has opened out to a superhighway of unlimited destination, anti-laborism having been converted decades ago, going back to the World War I era to Woodrow Wilson's Palmer Raids of suspected subversives and the Siberian Intervention to destroy Lenin and Bolshevism, easily into anti-communism, the anti-labor bias always kept in mind, with the New Deal the exception, to tighten the screws on working people. Anti-communism has created a wondrous field of elite-deception, for in its name the cultural form of ethnic cleansing is an ongoing process, the society's ideological boundaries ever shrinking (as in today's bread-and-circuses put on by both major parties to stifle criticism of alternative social values and changes of political economy), so that whole areas of domestic- and foreign- policy making have become non-negotiable and off-limits.

When I speak of rape, let me be clear, its generic and specific form, the generic as in despoil, pillage, ravage, the specific, these taking sexual form on the individual level, male forcibly over female, both, most important, on the same continuum. Today we are increasingly conscious of the rape of the environment, less so when a population is subjected to war, intervention, and, customarily, malnutrition, occupation, humiliation, in sum, a subject people. Presently Israel in its treatment/rape of Gaza, which fits all the particulars of the generic definition, but of course, the US as a global posture of rape, seen most of all in Vietnam, but in countless places of covert action, promotion of regime change, punishment for choosing the wrong sort of government (Cuba, Venezuela, etc.) kept studiously under the radar screen, all indicative of national policy dependent on forcible entry and the willful disregard of human life. Individual rape, the same thing, a microcosm in the psychodynamics of cruelty and depersonalization, the latter, of the other, but ultimately of the self. One country rapes another when its own identity has been so suppressed (the US, at least in its professions of democracy) or so freed up (Nazi Germany), yet again the same continuum within the continuum, because the identity of each rests on force, fraud, depersonalization, the fantasizing then actualization of unlimited power to prove one's supremacy over the other. Is individual rape any different—or even its threat? At work we see the same psychodynamics, including for both a conscious or unconscious sadism, the desire to inflict pain, in addition, a delight in cruelty.

I realize I am close to suggesting the instinctual foundation for domination, cruelty, and the rest (and therefore for rape), but my argument is the opposite: the societal context as the determinative factor in the form sexuality takes. Why the continuum? Because the individual is not unaware of the practices done in his name or the patina of legitimation done to protect them. I would argue that the



My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War, as one example, had an incremental yet symbolic import for the social climate of toleration over sexual intrusiveness prevalent now on American college and university campuses and reach down in the high schools. We wink at financial criminality, we wink at skullduggery coming in all shapes and flavors—wars and the ethos of domination does that to a society, in which nihilism and cynicism come to the fore. What I take to be the perversion of sexuality as a ready extension of the former, a societal behavior pattern so deeply ingrained in the national psyche as to become not aberrant but self-justifying. Nor is the St. Paul's School exempt from these character traits. Its purpose being as the training ground of the elite for (amoral) leadership. As I noted in my previous article, the Groton School at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, upper class to the hilt, where young FDR matriculated, was not like that, as I suppose St. Paul's also was not. My observation is not an apology for elitism, but to say that pride in Christian stewardship was a different kettle of fish from today's elite recruits and their directors. Groton's was a minority view among the upper echelons of the elite, which is to point out that even in those circles, societal context still allowed room for deviation.

Not so today. This is what helps explain the St. Paul's episode today, whether or not the senior successfully penetrated the freshman girl, whether or not he used force, for the School by its refusal to comment lent institutional support to the custom that allows for such acts to go on. Euphemistically termed the "senior salute," along with the known practice of each senior class passing on to the next a key to a rooftop machinery room where the girls are taken, is license of encouragement for sexual relations, consensual or not, where in the case being tried in Concord, New Hampshire, the girl, then 15, the boy, 18, gave convincingly testimony, despite being badgered by expert defense counsel, that it was not. (Rev. Peabody, headmaster of Groton, had no "senior salute" to contend with, nor I suspect was there a need to.) The girl showed poise and courage on the stand; besides the School's dodging the issue, almost as sad is that she feared at first to make complaint lest it antagonize fellow students, female as well as male, and administration. The young man, planning on attending Harvard, wants to study theology. More power to him, a paradigmatic career for the St. Paul's graduate fitting nicely into the circles of power. (The chaplain at one renowned university I taught at had extensive CIA experience.)

Democratization goes only so far in the prep-school setting. Diversity, why not? Coming from a poor background? Why not? The signs of going-along can be detected early, and the years ahead are a winnowing cum indoctrination process which if all else fails ensures the student a dead-end career if not booted out first. Orthodoxy is now the air we all breathe, for the privileged, no adjustment needed, for the rest, a growing surrender to the rules of the game, some—not realizing they are readily absorbed into and constitute no threat to the system—seeking limited salvation in sexual liberation (making their capture by the system that much easier). But widespread apathy and ignorance about policy, both resulting from lack of opportunity and the bludgeoning of political consciousness, make society's task of internal pacification that much easier. Notwithstanding the nation's wealth, this seems a one-way path to oblivion—or should we call it fascism?

I emphasize systemic causation, without wishing to ignore individual responsibility, because even the question of sexuality as a liberating force, is unconvincing, hardly in the same ball park as historical ethnic cleansing, racism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia, a tightly coalesced, hierarchical power structure, wealth concentration, war, intervention, globalization tailored to US's financial-industrial-political-ideological advantage, war, economic boycotts, all of the foregoing reduce

sexuality to a safety-valve, a paltry matter in light of the present organization of American capitalist development (to which each and every one of the items just listed played an important part in the process). But if we look briefly at gender freedom and sexual liberation (I say more in the previous article), we might see that they work on behalf of rather than oppose internal capitalist stabilization, one more diversion to be swallowed up and neutralized by capitalism under the façade of toleration. E.g., gay marriage and a transgender identity are gradually becoming recognized as integral human rights despite attacks on them still prevalent, the denial of these and the wider notion of human rights to embrace race, dissent, etc. intuitively understood to constitute a defense of law and order, homogeneity, and specifically now, prohibition of immigration. America's masses largely remain humanistically ignorant if not outright malicious, a spacious in-group fearful of the outsider. From that background of abuse, one would expect gays and others mistreated by society, to fight back, yet the record is less clear, still solipsistic; victims of discrimination and repression have still to learn that respect for human rights increasingly hangs on a slender thread, not that suppression has not always been the central experience of American radicalism (into which gay rights has been lumped as a category of disapproval). It behooves the victim not to become self-satisfied: human rights cannot be conditional in a democratic society.

Likewise, sexual liberation, though perhaps more so, must not be seen as a cure-all for the problems of capitalism, as appears currently in some quarters, and understandably so, given society's condition of malaise, the large unemployment rate, and the disconnection of policy making from the people. This merely gives authoritarianism a soft landing (as witness the Trump campaign). Between what I am calling gender freedom and sexual liberation, we see a perhaps enforced separation and consequent removal of potentially system-breaking signs of unassimilable practice, given the at least latent proto-fascism of American society. Capitalism provides a wondrous instrument of assimilation (aka, brainwashing), but better, authority reasons, better not let it go too far lest labor loses the disciplining force needed to maximize production and keep profits rolling in. Patriotism and profits alike are dependent on the cohesion of the social order. We are witnessing a general dumbing down, where sexual liberation looks good to its practitioners, assisted by surround-sound media constant stimuli of consumerism, both sexual and material, and Veblen's pecuniary culture of predation and exploitation brought up to date.

Even when rape is not rape it is becoming a characteristic response of human encounter. Marx saw this very early, although not in quite the generalized meaning employed here. He rooted the behavior in capitalism, and more specifically, capitalism's commodity structure, the core of the system, in which exchange value trumps if not dislodges use value, and the modal thought is, "What's in it for me?" We treat human beings as instruments of our own satisfaction, feeling of dominance, even amusement (as when St. Paul's boys brag about who can "score" the most with female classmates usually younger and fearful of bucking the school's mores and customs, a term I had not heard since the 1950's though still current). Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 treats alienation, but the mind-set equally describes rape, as the violation of the human person, while the aggressor, building defenses against introspection, is also being dehumanized (itself a convenient way of covering up from oneself the inhumanity of the act).

Sexuality does not have to be cruel, self-centered, and inhumane. While under capitalism the cultural-structural tendency is tending that, this is symptomatic of the need for power where everything about one points to money-grubbing, confirmation of one's belonging, and the testing of

competitive relations, a surfeit of which places ego-fulfilling sexuality as a prime outlet for stored-up aggression. It does not have to be that way, but so long as reactionary ideas tear at the soul of the American people, making for hierarchy, invidious class distinctions, a callousness to one's fellows, sexuality will take on increasingly puerile forms incapable of genuine love relations. The permissiveness adopted by authority where rape is concerned is for radicals rightly so a dirty word indicating complicity with this practice, but it is also, seldom broached, a rejection and violation of the linkage between freedom and responsibility vital to the social respect and the guarantee of legal and political rights of all human beings.

Rape is the negation of democracy. Yet the St. Paul's School, typical of elite culture, answers to no-one but itself. The advantage of wealth and privilege is to wrap oneself and one's class in a frozen time-warp which has not changed for half-a-century. Yet so tenacious has been the control of upper groups that ordinarily progressive social forces (I grant sexual liberation that encomium) become perverted through the broader cultural restraints, e.g., a propensity for war, extreme wealth-concentration, that fortify aggression in the popular mind. Yet, sexual liberation cannot be made a litmus test for radicalism. Confessedly, I remain a proponent of single-sex education (disclosure, my wife is Radcliffe '57) because as late as the decade of the 'fifties male and female students could be themselves, free from pressures to preen and impress, dress as they cared, focus on their work, and as a result, not turn every date into a "score" but treat the individual as a whole person. This may romanticize the age (older people often do), but the possibility of finding love was greater then than now. Does this demean women and infringe on their freedom? Freedom of action was still an individual matter, but at least then the pressures making for early sexualization were appreciably lower and identity more valued and realizable. I doubt whether the boys' culture at St. Paul's could have made headway in that cultural setting.

I mentioned in the previous article the writings of Kreiger, Pappenheim, Marcuse, and Marx, all quite different, Marcuse alone—the influence of Freud—being concerned with sexuality. But if revolution is not on the horizon, neither at perhaps the other end is libido the starting point for realizing societal transformation, as though an energy field promising a nonalienated existence. Alienation is key to capitalism, and unless overcome transmogrifies sexuality into a destructive force. As historical causation goes, sexuality is not a game-changer. St. Paul's, our speck in the universe of American capitalism, one-sided male-gratification begins early, the teens; one has no proof but perhaps inadvertently the object is accustomization of the boys to the experience of domination via sexual mores. This is in keeping with upper-class expectations, but also thinking ahead it ideally conduces to the hierarchical structuring of advanced capitalism. The boys are not there for their health; they are custodians of subsequent class privilege. To accord dignity to others, whether in sexual or other relations (i.e., studied contempt for the poor), violates the gentleman's code, for it is anathema to the dynamics of power. Mutuality signifies lowering the bars, a step toward socialism.

Marx was unconcerned about sexual liberation or gratification. Society, in its democratization, came first: the improvement of living standards, an equitable productive system, conditions, wages, and hours very much to the point, and stripping bare the layers of false consciousness, grounded beyond obvious capitalist control and power in commodity fetishism. Absent these changes, sexuality converts into self-indulgence and is an ersatz escape from society. As it is, the doors are closed practically worldwide to working people. One more diversion from the need for

confrontation is routinely expected, as meanwhile sexuality in its myriad forms is the surrogate for a societal humanization that never comes about. The issue of sexuality brings to the foreground the need for prior transformation if it is not to be encased in a politicized form; humanize society before or as integral to the process of the democratization of sex—else there follows the perversion of the love-relationship. Capitalism handily, as it grows in sophistication, absorbs both gender freedom and sexual liberation, adding insult to injury by commercializing them, all well and good, a process of narcotization, for diverting attention from unemployment data, wealth concentration, the rise of ethnocentrism and xenophobia—all in a day's work for a ruling class of combined political, financial commercial, and military membership feeling their oats yet also running scared that America is becoming dislodged from its unilateral hegemonic global status. Thank you St. Paul's for indirect encouragement to write about institutionalized elitism and arrogance.

AUGUST 28, 2015

### **World Capitalism, a Basket Case: A Layman's View**

The ultimate breakdown of capitalism has become a spectator sport on the Left, most present-day observers happy enough (realistic enough?) to point out nonterminal contradictions as, in both Europe and America, individuals and parties inclined or devoted to socialism have been drawn or pressured to the Center—for me, a sign of the moral bankruptcy of the times, as false consciousness over the long-term has been politically-structurally driven into the psyche of the general populace, and especially working people (is it still meaningful to speak of a working class in America when now unionization is heading into single digits?). Class for so long has given way to fragmentation of the stratum and atomization of the individual, both incumbent on capitalism if it is to retain an objective structure of stratification and the power, coalesced at the top, that goes with it. The picture is grim, systemically ugly, a Donald Trump personifying a society diverted by war and consumerism, and, given the contradictions (yes, these still count) papered over, largely free to operate on its present course, which represents a historical straight-line projection from at least the end of the Civil War until now. Thus, no surprises: market penetration and financial-commercial expansion, accompanied by the use or suggestion of military force, as the base line for the industrialization and railroad development that brought the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a close, serving notice on the 20<sup>th</sup> that monopolism, wealth concentration, and labor suppression constituted the DNA already of what would be the more advanced stage of capitalism—the stage being an arbitrary designation given the continuity of development, ideological as well as political and economic.

Contradictions? These are implicit by every indicator in the treatment of labor, immigrants, and the poor, whether Midwestern farmers, miners, or blacks still chained to the cotton fields: most obvious, the policy of under-consumption, or if you will, the deliberate cheapening of labor, not done by a gathering of upper groups, as conspiracy theory might have it, but via the functional imperative of the system, because capitalism, particularly in the period of what Marx would refer to, the English enclosure movement in mind, as that of primitive accumulation, both for the straightforward purposes of capital accumulation and the far-reaching objective process of disciplining the labor force and underlying population to acquiescence in the principles, practices, and conditions of the system. No fool would work to exhaustion for a pittance, or later become brainwashed into acceptance of harsh conditions still unrewarded, unless the systemic walls of force closed in on her/him. When a system was rooted in contradiction at the outset, the element of

repression cannot be avoided (and in the dominant ideology, was not) if the fissures breaking apart the social order were to be sewed up. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Gatling gun showcased the force ready at hand, while in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by subtler means, using both carrot-and-stick, subtler only in the sense that shooting down workers while still present had to share place with seeming concessions offered by government and business, defined the ultimate societal context in which labor was degraded and subordinated in the political economy and body politic.

These two, body politic and political economy, were joined together, more, were inseparable, as part of the overall systemic tightening in which the interpenetration of government and business had ensured, certainly by World War II, a solidified Capitalist State, at the expense of its working people and increasingly even its middle classes. The bulk of society therefore would be admitted into the polity on condition of good behavior, yet fully marginalized in practice as given pro forma rights of citizenship while decision-making lay in the hands exclusively of upper groups which transmitted downward policies, ideology, values. The concentration of wealth and power, intensified through time (even during the New Deal, despite movement toward greater balance between capital and labor, the National Recovery Administration provided the stimulus for greater monopolization), makes a mockery of any pretense of democracy. A brief moment of prideful affirmation, after more than three decades into the new century, was the organizing drives of the CIO and UAW, which even a sympathetic administration placed at arm's length and howls of communism were raised in corporate circles. By the 1950s, the crackdown on labor was coming from all directions, expanded to include dissent per se, all enveloped in a veritable crusade of anticommunism, which became code for anything or anyone daring to question capitalism, the wars it chose to fight, a foreign policy of aggressive counterrevolution, and the militarization of the total system and its values.

CP readers and contributors old enough to have lived through the decade know the harshness of the ideological-political-academic climate first hand, e.g., friends who lost their college posts, workers expelled from their unions, society awash in loyalty oaths and investigations, all of which had become normalized under Cold War reputed exigencies—in reality, a pretext for domestic repression as well as morbid fear of advancing communism. Why then the contrived alarm and prevalence of repression? After World War II, much of the remainder of the world, but not the US, in rubble, American capitalism saw the opportunity to assume the leadership of world capitalism and make capitalism itself the foundation of the world economy. Waging the Cold War was both rational (part of America's counterrevolutionary effort to prevent socialism in Europe, Asia, and Latin America) and irrational (exaggerating the threat posed by Russia, the result of which was to shift the American political spectrum sharply and permanently rightward and all that represented to this day, such as massive surveillance of the American people—a wish of the 1950s made true under Barack Obama and advances in technology). When I say “rational,” I mean of course from the standpoint of American capitalism, which thrives on war, repression, and conformity, a true rendering of national purpose as measured by societal historical development and the thinking of leadership—yet by any other name (and speaking truth to power) wholly irrational. As for “irrational” proper, I mean the inflation of fear to the point of domestic hysteria and overreaction in foreign policy. In a way, distinctions here are meaningless, the US crossing the line in both directions whenever advantage suits. To policy makers, overreaction is never that but the deliberate employment of force perceived as needed.

Thus by the early 1950s America wanted to be first and fast out of the gate, postwar recovery being still a slow process in Europe and Asia, with other capitalist systems beholden to America a principal goal. Perhaps ironically, dismantling the British Empire took precedence over the de-Nazification of Germany, as meanwhile the Cold War directed against the Soviet Union was the ideal framework for moving quickly to define the global framework according to American interests. One might say that ruling groups were in ecstasy whether or not they showed it. By inculcating fear and suspicion into American society, in that way encouraging confidence in and submission to the leadership structure including its industrial and military components, the necessary mental-set appropriate to opposing supposed Russian world conquest had been created. Only we adventitiously or conveniently got it wrong. It was the US, not Russia, that was on the path to and fully gearing up for global hegemony, America's social base at home enlisted in the cause. Sound too schematic? If one takes the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this becomes crisis time, put up or shut up, if US capitalism is to absorb its contradictions; for by this point its systemic maturity made for less resilience and specifically military solutions to political-economic problems came front and center. To hark back, war, repression, conformity, these made America the ideal leader of the world capitalist community, yet a place which had already been "earned" since World War I, when capitalizing on worldwide destruction, social discontent, and war weariness, the US was free to develop its industrial and financial strength as others recuperated and reconstructed.

Capitalism, whether at a youthful or late stage, has historically proven itself poorly equipped to serve its people or overcome the gyrations of the business cycle. Under-consumption is one if not the chief contradiction, war-provoking political-structural tendencies another, overreach, as in attempting to superintend the whole of globalization including control of the world's banking and financial systems a third. The system is more fragile than its disciples, leaders, and generals care to admit, hence, almost as a reflex action, the built-in tendency to repression, America an exemplar in this regard, now soft-glove, out-of-sight, when affordable (the militarization of local police a counter-indication), more 19<sup>th</sup> century when not, as new challenges to domestic order emerge. We are seeing this today with the phobic response to immigration. Yet fragile or not, power is always the recommended antidote for self-doubt. America's military budget dwarfs all others, singly or combined, as perhaps signifying an anterior guilt for bringing about havoc to capitalism as a system in its own goal of world domination. When I say, then, world capitalism as basket case, it is the US amputating its limbs through a singular reading of globalization and antisocialism, an attempt beyond outsourcing and forcing market penetration on favorable terms to pursue a policy of divide-and-conquer, even against its fellow allies, as witness the negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership which gives American corporations a privileged sanctuary among the signatories.

America has a virulent case of solipsism, particularly in its practice of capitalism. It hides behind the world capitalist community, gnawing at the vitals of its partners and colleagues, tying them up in military alliances, seeking one-on-one trade advantages, the while playing good citizen to that world community. As for socialism, implacable hostility unless the opportunity presents for modal change—but even then persistence of the spirit of anticommunism to perpetuate tensions and fears to keep the alliance systems and trade agreements intact and ensure social obedience at home. China and Russia, deep-down, remain demonized despite America's heavy investment in each; hypocrisy goes a long way in international economics. The US has already neutralized and/or co-opted the ideological energies of both nations, paving the way for still further investment. Has capitalism transcended its contradictions, leaving Marx and Marxists far behind? Proponents of capitalism,

don't hold your breath. The present market turmoil is a case in point, although the patient will no doubt recover. My view however is more long-term.

Pivotal here is the role of the people in providing the groundwork for American capitalism. In spite of its manifest failure to provide for their needs, they are hardly in revolt, if sporadically they once were. Marcuse writing in *Reason and Revolution* speaks of capitalism's power to absorb its negativity; if I may, in paraphrase, I'd say, capitalism's power to absorb the spirit of its working people through the promotion of false consciousness (today an exquisite balance between consumerism and deftly administered force). The semi-fascist complexion of large numbers is the values' destination of capitalism in its drive to secure perfect hierarchy. And apropos of that I must take issue with fellow Leftists who use the 1% as a designation of ruling-class power. That is absurd and misleading however well-intentioned. America's class-system is tighter, more concentrated, more powerful than we suspect. The current population is close to 300,000,000. 1% of that is 3,000,000, large, diffuse, unwieldy, nowhere near constituting a ruling class. One-tenth of 1%, 300,000, equally preposterous when it comes to holding and wielding real power. Some writers speak of 80 families as possessing wealth the equivalent of a significant portion of those below. We don't have to play numbers games, but 10,000-25,000 is a charitable estimate, which in a population of 300,000,000 makes for a frighteningly small upper group residing atop the structural hierarchy as though dancing on the head of a pin. But they're no angels. Whatever the exact number, and it probably changes frequently within what structurally are carefully imposed limits, we see a salient contradiction of capitalism looming: that between a numerically small elite and political-economic-social democracy. Democracy and ruling groups, democracy and the gross maldistribution of wealth, democracy and policy making secretive in nature (especially on issues of war and peace), do not and never will mix.

This contradiction, the disconnection of power inhering in capitalist social structure, is worthy of inclusion with those named above. But while I'm at it, here is a further one that Marx did not treat: we speak of structural contradiction, not or seldom moral contradiction, which leads to a more inclusive indictment of capitalism—specifically that between profit, which is central to capitalism, and the debasement of the human personality. Actually, Marx comes close, with alienation and commodity fetishism, but it also appears in the mechanics of capitalist volatility as the cold-blooded pursuit of gain, laced with fear, of investors. In a way, the market makes us all investors, not human beings, as though chained to a roulette table seeking impersonal gain to match a depersonalized life. Add to that another contradiction under capitalism, that between productive and nonproductive purposes of society, at their interstices exploitation, the hardship of people laboring under the shadow of potential abundance.

We blame China for the current market imbroglio, which is actually wrong on both counts, not a confused mess or China's exclusive doing. America sits astride world capitalism. It has for some time, beginning say with Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan, the IMF, projected its own goals on the global economy (Gabriel and Joyce Kolko wrote repeatedly on this) as it pushed harder over the ensuing decades to establish its position of world dominance. It's there, and therefore bears a high degree of responsibility for the troubles facing individual capitalist states and those under the pressures it created long in the making to become so. But my title is a misnomer, for it is America rather than the world that is the basket case. Towering military strength is gained through sucking up the societal resources that could instead provide its people a better life and at the same time lead

to a sense of international comity and friendship, rather than war and destruction. Chalk up another score for contradiction, whether structural or moral or both. I leave the discussion of market behavior to the excellent writings of other CP contributors; my interest lies in the historical continuity of America's quest for hegemony. That record leaves little hope America will seize the initiative to realize its own democratization.

My New York Times Comment attached to Wednesday's late afternoon market report, Eavis-Gough-Jolly, "U.S. Markets Close Up Higher," (Aug. 26), follows, same date:

The long climb upward, the economic crisis situation less caused by China's policies than by a world capitalist system unable or unwilling to modify its speculative demiurge. This is systemic, blame to go around for all. So hopefully no tears from investors, hedge fund operators, merger-inclined ceo's—you guys contributed to bringing this on, scaring hell out of pension-holders and others looking to a secure future. We as a society demonize Li and esp. Putin; why not start demonizing RISK and risk-takers? Even capitalism, although one can sometimes wonder, can have a productive side. This should be encouraged instead of the manufacture of paper wealth. When we get back to 18,000 more deserving people will be able to sleep at night.

SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

### **Obama, Flim-Flam Artist: Alaska Offshore Drilling**

In the name of addressing climate change, Obama, with his order for new Coast Guard icebreakers, encouragement of National Park use, and of course permission for Shell Oil to engage in off-shore drilling, has placed the Arctic in a massive capitalistic framework, suitably militarized and commercialized, to accelerate the very thing he claims to oppose. Even if emissions were controlled in the Lower 48 (which will not be the case), point-specific damage within the Arctic itself will transform the ecosystem into a step-by-step collapse of safeguards into a slithering mess—courtesy the American value system of waste, want not, bully all comers. Climate change, far from being just another issue, becomes a mirror reflecting into the darkest chambers of the American soul: a contempt, as though enthralled by a death wish, for life itself. Whether the US has murdered villagers in a Vietnamese hamlet, engaged in support of death squads in Latin America, actively encouraged the greatest concentration of wealth in US history (and consequent economic and social degradation of the unemployed and working poor), or consciously, willfully raped the environment in myriad ways, these actions are all of one cloth, the violation of life, future as well as present generations and the Nature which sustains us all.

How contemptuous our leadership, bi-partisan in outdoing each other in facilitating the destruction of the natural order. From "Better dead than red," we've come to, "Better self-indulgent than create the common good," a progression tied together by cords of nihilism, opportunism, moral emptiness. Our treatment of the environment tells us who we are, just as how a nation treats its poor reveals its inner secret, what defines its spirit. If Obama had skipped the Alaska visit, the platitudes of American leadership and self-righteousness, the gobbledegook, and straightforwardly announced rather than sought to cover up the leases he authorized for Shell oil-drilling, one might at least have respected his honesty. Instead we have duplicity worthy of a Goebbels—true, nothing new, coming



out of this administration from the moment of taking office, all now colorfully packaged in the name of the President's Legacy.

I'd rather think, his legacy lies in drone assassination, confrontation with Russia and, more systematically, China (the Trans-Pacific Partnership), enlarged military spending, Washington's protective, enriching arm over Wall Street, these just for starters and not necessarily the most important if one attempted to bring together all the steps in the assertion of US global military-financial-commercial-ideological hegemony, with, now, Alaska, a somewhat poor, unconvincing diversion from the main scene of action. Are we imbeciles, that we cannot see through them? The New York Times may voluntarily remain hoodwinked, even the public, habituated to official lies, but, hopefully, not everyone. Open the way to greater maritime traffic. Perhaps even modernize the salmon industry. Why not? What's good for GM is good for—no, right imagery and reasoning, wrong particulars. What's good for Shell Oil is good for America. So, Obama is going to hike into the wilderness to dramatize his manhood and love of nature. It reminds me of TR's camping out in Yosemite with, I believe, Muir: luxury tents rolled out, a bevy of Secret Service men in attendance, etc.

Hogwash. When Obama shows he cares about climate change he will simultaneously cut the military budget by two-thirds, crack down with an iron fist on domestic pollution, establish a crash program on alternative energy sources, start construction on a mass transportation system, again, for starters, and where leadership comes in, show by an ethic of asceticism that living close and eschewing waste (both antithetical to consumerism), along with a redistribution of wealth to make such a living transformation possible, then we can begin to believe him, and not until. The environment is a jealous mistress. It abhors war, it abhors intervention, it abhors regime change—it abhors the contradiction between aggression (through every facet of life) and a loving gentleness (toward the world which sustains us). Addressing climate change is not a balancing act; one Shell oil drilling right vitiates the presumed aim and exposes Obama for consistent villainous action, a momentous counterrevolution against nature and aspirant democracy in the world alike.

SEPTEMBER 3, 2015

### **American Jews and the Iran Accord: The Politics of Fear**

Jews in America have moved massively to the Right since World War II, negating a proud historical record of humanistic radicalism/socialism and literary-musical-artistic achievement often reflecting radical themes, both currents symbolized by Aaron Copeland's monumental anti-fascist Symphony #3 composed during the war. Only 9 at the time I instinctively drew my roots from that moment when to be Jewish was symbolically to link arms with Paul Robeson and Negro protest (yes, the term "Negro" was, and remains for me dear and deeply ennobling, when public-relations crutches were not needed to assert the dignity of a glorious people) and the tough, fearless CIO organizers, as well, of course, FDR when 90% of the time he got things right, and, among New Dealers, Henry Wallace and the ever gracious Eleanor. Communists, as a child and forever after, were not on my radar screen, not because of fear and wanting self-protection (in the 1960s I introduced Aptheker to a lecture audience at Yale Law School, and in the '50s at Harvard was part of a Marxist study group with Paul Sweezy), but because they were a stodgy, dogmatic bunch, harmless beyond words. Those experiences, a significant number of Jews still active in progressive

causes, suggests I and others were not in a solipsistic religious bubble, a condition fast changing, as anti-communism intellectually saturated college campuses from which Harvard was not immune and Brandeis, despite Marcuse's distinguished presence, was a path-setter. The intellectual cum loyalty crunch was on. Jews thought themselves particularly vulnerable, and all but a few—who remained steadfast radicals—buckled.

But let me go back to the earlier setting. Jews faced discrimination and worse in America. When my family moved to Miami Beach in 1939 we were confronted with signs on apartment entrances, "No dogs or Jews allowed," an atmosphere which by the early '40s quickly changed, but in the country at large, even the situation facing Jewish veterans, job discrimination, ugly incidents, gang wars, beard-pulling, smashed windows of small businesses, if not quite a community under siege then certainly the tangible ripeness of anti-Semitism. In hindsight, it's difficult to know whether postwar anti-Semitism was a special case of anti-communism or an independent expression of proto-fascistic feeling. Ironically, the nation that fought the war to save democracy quickly transformed itself into one which was in popular mood highly undemocratic. Why is this important to the present topic? Jews with good reason have always been sensitive to persecution. The question, here I am thinking of America, is whether they fought back, kept on an even keel, watchful yet confident, or, third, became demoralized and desperate for political-ideological respectability, clutching to an Americanism (conservatism) to ward off possible attack. By 1950 we begin to see the effects of that choice.

Anti-Semitism subsides to that extent that Jews prominently display their anti-communism, and, important to note, hide behind or openly identify with Israel, to an appreciative Christian nation that has a fundamentalist respect for religion as such, grounded in biblical sanction, and displays the warlike qualities vocally praised by Americans. Israel is a crowd-pleaser for American reactionaries, giving Jews in this country twofold incentive to abandon their prewar record of radicalism and, to some, equally subversive, their artistic achievement, in favor of absolute conformity to American ways: a grand enlistment in the Cold War. By the early 1950s I was intensely proud of Judaism as a religion and spiritual source of humanitarian ethics, yet with growing alarm feared its dissociation from its own heritage. The execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg was a flaming sword across the sky, a pivot point in converting Jewish retreat from radicalism already begun to cowardice disengagement from the past and the wholesale embrace of American reaction and Israeli ethnic cleansing (although it wasn't called that yet).

That in-between period, 1950-1965, before the Jewish community would even turn on its own who did not support US and Israeli policy down the line, saw the splintering process under the pressure of the Cold War and internal housecleaning of suspected subversives (Joe McCarthy had Cohn and Schine, a team rich in symbolic import), in which Judaism witnessed the conflict for its secular soul, i.e. its place in American society. There were still young people breaking down the color line and standing on the picket line. My own observations, based on widespread demonstrating, from lunch-counter desegregation, to Mississippi Freedom Summer, and beyond that, was the presence of large numbers of Jewish youngsters wholly involved (the murders of Schwerner, Cheney, and Goodman, having symbolic import to the opposite effect) showed the division within the Jewish community was still real, many of the parents already edging into the Cold War consensus governing public opinion. Golda Meir could have been the latter's

spokesperson when she referred to blacks as schwartzes, which for her was extended to mean Palestinians.

After 1965 Jews had shelved their identity as cosmopolitan and sympathetic to progressive causes to a play-it-safe rigid mental posture celebratory of Judaism and Israel stripped of any radical content or implications. Dancing the hora became the American Way, the subtext being membership in the Republican party, and policies favoring confrontation, intervention, and support of dictators. To be expected, the Jewish community became the watchdog over American policies toward Israel, but to go the extra mile, and purge Jewish dissent, while endorsing every aggressive move in American foreign policy, is less expected. This is where we are now at, the pending issue, approval of the Iran Accord, bringing out the worst features imaginable of a people once thoroughly schooled in democracy. I have no apologies to make; from now on, when we pray over the Shabbos candles, I think of the victims of US and Israel, not the presumed godliness of Israel (by now, I hope God has given up trying to protect or justify the actions of America). No apologies because what has transpired is fully expected after a half-century and more of the two nations' militarism and hegemonic goals set for themselves.

The wellspring of hatred has burst, a veritable gusher of vituperation loosened on the heads of Jews, by Jews, on the grounds of not following orders laid down by Israel. Negotiations must fail. Iran must be destroyed. The poisonous attack on fellow Jews may be without precedent, one orchestrated by pressures groups possessing seemingly unlimited funds and implementing what amounts to a right-wing ideological agenda, for after Iran, then what, each, Israel and America, taking on their respective further enemies and evils? Iran, in reality, is a litmus test of geopolitical proportions for the US and Israel. Sadly, the Obama policy so virulently opposed by Israel and, in the main, American Jews, is a half-hearted step toward a fair settlement, punitive in attitude and the retention of some sanctions, typically oriented to regime change, meant to be humiliating, etc., yet somehow too "soft" for its opponents. This is instructive of how far the political-ideological spectrum in Israel and America has shifted to the Right.

Ironically, we see Jewish anti-Semitism practiced by those who make the charge: in practice, Jews are forced to recant their critical sensibilities; to be acceptable, they must conform to categorical allegiance to Israel and deny community standing to any who challenge the anti-Accord policy and strategy mounted against its supporters. You are for us or against us, no middle ground, no discussion. Crudeness, in best totalitarian fashion, trumps dialogue. We've seen this before, most recently, with respect to the Israeli assault on Gaza, criticism of the Settlements, and, as in the crackdown on Israeli dissent, the growing militarization of the society. Intimidation replaces Torah as the touchstone of being Jewish. One might hypothesize a massive guilt feeling for violations of Torah, as in the formation of in-group superiority against the putative outsider, a combined xenophobia and ethnocentrism as a textbook example of Theodor Adorno's Authoritarian Personality; the attitudinal framework also characterizes much of the American Jewish community, in both cases, communities turning their backs on Judaism to identify with militarism as the road to certitude.

The Iran Accord is not life-threatening. Making it so is the work of warped minds. In both Israel and America, Jews have lost their capacity for empathy and an appreciation of suffering. When Gaza was being shelled, Israelis took to the Siderot hillside to eat munchies and cheer, while not a peep in America during the "shock and awe" bombing campaign at the start of the Iraq War. Why

bloodless in the face of self-created human misery? I see only tragedy and further destruction ahead. And to fill out some of the above I turn now to Jonathan Weisman and Alexander Burns's New York Times article, "Iran Deal Opens a Vitriolic Divide Among American Jews," (Aug. 28), which documents, as the title suggests, venomous attacks made against fellow Jews. The case in point, Jerrold Nadler, an Orthodox Jew, Yeshiva educated, supporter of Israel throughout his congressional career, and now supporter of the Iran Accord. The reporters write: "The animus is hard to miss. On his Facebook page, Mr. Nadler has been called a kapo: a Jew who collaborated with Nazis in the World War II death camps. One writer said he had 'blood on his hands.' Another said he had 'facilitated Obama's holocaust.'"

What kind of twisted minds spout such extremism? Example: "Dov Hikind, a New York State assemblyman, rented a double-decker bus this week; plastered the smiling face of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on it; and parked it in front of Mr. Nadler's office. On Wednesday, he took six Auschwitz survivors to the office to condemn Mr. Nadler." Even the Anti-Defamation League thought this overly much, to which Hikind sarcastically replied, "'This immature, babyish, childish whining? Stop. I'm just getting started.'" I fear American Jewry, in firm alliance with an increasingly reactionary Israeli government, is also just getting started.

My New York Times Comment on the Weisman-Burns article, same date, follows:

Not surprising; since the 1950s most of American Jewry have been super-patriots, super-conformists—possibly out of fear of what happened to the Rosenbergs, but also a postwar conservatism adopted so different from Jews' prideful affirmation of radical and humanistic causes prior to World War II: civil rights, labor, toleration in general.

I am an anti-Zionist Jew; there are more like me worldwide but intimidated into silence. The fox-and-lox, canasta, safe, respectable syndrome operates smoothly, justifying repression and discrimination at home, intervention, war, regime change abroad. So let me speak out: Israel's treatment of Palestinians and its foreign policy from Day 1 is a desecration of Judaism, a caring, humane, world religion having made a disproportionate contribution to science, letters, world peace. And now? Petty fascists in Israel, people and leaders alike, and in US a morbidly rigid base of support, self-righteous, drawing inward, clannish, denying Jewish cosmopolitanism.

To me, contemptuous weaklings on the wrong side of history. Obama, from a Left perspective, is a farce, imposter, etc., so that even the Iran negotiation was punitive and still predicated on force. Yet in real-world terms the best we can hope for. I support the Treaty. Much of the Jewish community does not, its response to supporters that they are anti-Semites dramatically showing their moral cowardice and bankruptcy. Judaism will outlive its frightened members.

SEPTEMBER 4, 2015

### **Paradigm of a Fascist Mindset: Nicholas Burns on Iran**

The American political-ideological spectrum has become so twisted and falsified (in the sense of not representing anything close to a true left-right spectrum) over the last several decades by a

bipartisan ironclad global commitment to counterrevolution and, within that context, US unilateral world supremacy, that we are being told the approval or defeat of the Iran Accord is a matter of life-and-death and deep policy division. In reality, Democrats and Republicans are so close together on Iran whether favoring or disfavoring the Accord that peace is the last thing on anyone's mind. The assertion of power, economic blackmail, humiliation, whatever it takes to bring Iran to its knees and thus guarantee America's dominating interest and status in the region, along with Israel as the nuclear-armed comprador to look after its own and America's regional military supremacy. In other words, Obama manning the ramparts against the Republicans is pure hokum, he, like them, in addition to bowing to Israel's wishes, wants regime change as prelude to outright subservience.

It won't work. The US may be making Iran a pawn in the game of confrontation with Russia and China, which cannot allow it to be crushed, but even in short-term geostrategic planning, this will further enflame the Middle East, mistakenly thought by Israel and America to their benefit. It isn't. Finally both countries by their own actions will have their come-uppance, whether as the politics of oil, the incitement of ISIS-type groups, or both. And Obama's self-righteous glibness fools no-one. More even than a pawn, Iran has become, like Vietnam, a symbol for resisting and obstructing American empire—intolerable to the power-market-military lust of the US.

Here I'd like to look at Nicholas Burns's op-ed piece in the New York Times, "What Should Obama Do Next on Iran?" (Sept. 2), the title itself indicative of going beyond the projected Accord into the realm of real or implied punishment. Punishment after having already submitted to imposed terms, the perfect formula for humiliation and regional subordination. Burns, former undersecretary of state, now at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, anticipating the return of Congress to Washington after the Labor Day recess, sees the upcoming vote on Iran as "its most important since the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003," and proudly announces, "I testified in favor of the agreement before four congressional committees, and talked with many members individually during July and August." No disinterested spectator, he. Obama is on track: "It now appears almost certain that [he] has the votes to prevail in Congress." Hence, the stage is set for going further.

America, he writes, "had a right to hope for a more genuine, sober debate," given this is "on a war-and-peace issue that will affect American power in the Middle East for a generation to come," (a non sequitur, in that war and peace = America's supremacy in the region, plainly axiomatic), yet no Republican in either the Senate or the House "is likely to vote for the deal." The "deal," as Burns calls it, will have to be made more convincing to them via a toughening which in any case is needed and desired. On its face, it doesn't go far enough: "Mr. Obama has managed to persuade most Democrats that, however imperfect, there is no effective alternative to a deal that will freeze Iran's nuclear apparatus for more than a decade by diplomacy rather than another Middle East war." To which Republicans would be "walking away unilaterally," rather than engaging Democrats in debate. (Misguided idealist that I am, I would think that never having embarked on the sanctions regime, or lifting it now, in conjunction with providing Iran a security pledge against Israeli nuclear weapons, and US general disengagement from the region's internal affairs, might have, by removing pressures to ensure Iran's pariah status, resolved matters, including permitting Iran's peacetime use of nuclear energy, if that was its wish.)

But no doubt cooler minds, like Burns's, prevail. Trust, international inspection, obviously for sissies, as he continues, charging that Iran would bide its time until the immediate provisions of the treaty ran out, and then spring upon an innocent world! This transitional argument, conjuring up

holy terror (in faintly diplomatic language) is worth quoting: “Though rejecting the deal would only strengthen Iran and weaken America’s global credibility [note, “credibility” is integral to the Cold War lexicon], Republicans have been right to highlight the deal’s principal weakness—it could permit Iran to emerge stronger 10 to 15 years from now as restrictions on its nuclear program begin to lapse. Specifically, an unfettered Iran in 2030 would be free to reconstitute an expanded civil nuclear program. It could possibly use that program, as it has in the past, to build a covert nuclear arms effort. This is one of the deal’s major downside risks that the Obama team has struggled to counter.” By this token Team Obama’s own support has been only conditional, not whole-hearted. Obama poses as world peacemaker, clutching nuclear weapons in both hands.

Too soft? Burns to the rescue (presumably with administration blessing). “Whether Iran gets that far,” he observes, “will depend ultimately on the leadership and will of the United States to stop it. That is why Mr. Obama needs to affirm what has been missing in the Iran debate: a comprehensive United States strategy to contain Iran’s support for terrorism and to prevent it from becoming a nuclear weapons power.” He unashamedly invokes further Cold War imagery dusted off for the occasion: “As with the Truman Doctrine, where the United States vowed not to let Greece and Turkey go Communist in the late 1940s, Mr. Obama should declare that he and his successors will not permit Iran to go nuclear.” This not-so-subtle mixture of anticommunism and counterterrorism would help to assuage some doubts (as well as re-establish credibility): “This won’t win him many Republican votes in the short term, but it will be a serious response to their concerns and reassure wavering Democrats. More important, it is the right response to an assertive Iran and will recoup some of our diminished credibility in the region.”

Even the Accord is small potatoes; antecedently, the projection of American power, here, a testing ground for diplomacy quite unlike the accustomed form: “Mr. Obama should not be content to have his veto sustained in Congress. His more important aim, looking beyond the vote, is to win the long-term struggle with Iran for power in the Middle East.” Burns explains: “To begin this effort, the administration should commit to a policy of coercive diplomacy [savor the words, enough to shame Metternich]—major steps to keep Iran on the defensive and push back against its growing power in the Middle East.” Then getting down to business, he notes: “The president should suggest that Republicans and Democrats agree on a separate resolution to support this more tough-minded approach. Such a resolution could begin to heal the wounds from the bruising Iran debate and chart a more assertive American posture in the region.” It would also, I surmise, make the Accord not worth the paper it’s written on—which is really Washington’s intent in the first place. “Heal the wounds” of nonexistent policy differences between the major parties, but heaven forbid healing the wounds of a much imposed upon Iran.

Next a bill of particulars—a barely restrained foreign policy framework of aggression, suitably bipartisan, as though political unity at home takes precedence over the actual consequences of policy (which in any event are seen as completely salutary). Thus: “A new, bipartisan policy should include the following elements. First, Mr. Obama could reaffirm President Jimmy Carter’s doctrine from the 1970s that the United States will defend its vital interests in the security of the Persian Gulf region against any aggressor. This would bolster the recent efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry to strengthen the defense of Saudi Arabia and the gulf states.” This architecture of global hegemony doesn’t pause to take a breath—Burns now linking the general and the specific: “Second, Mr. Obama could state in unmistakably clear terms that the United States would use military force

to strike Iran should it violate the nuclear agreement and drive toward a nuclear weapon. This would be an important reassurance to many members of Congress in both parties who want to see the nuclear deal not as an isolated initiative but as an integral part of a larger and more assertive American regional policy.” Those last words bear repeating: an integral part of a larger and more assertive American regional policy.

When we follow out American thinking, Iran at times becomes beside the point in the larger configuration of regional power. Burns’s next point in the framework of power: “Third, Mr. Obama could announce the expedited renewal this autumn of the United States-Israel military assistance agreement, set to expire in 2017. This would counter Iran’s support of Hezbollah and Hamas in challenging Israel’s security on its northern and southern borders. Mr. Obama could commit to ensuring Israel’s qualitative military edge over Iran and other regional rivals.” Then borrowing a rhetorical leaf from JFK’s “I am a Berliner,” for after all, Harvard men build on one another’s insights, Burns, in ace-in-the-hole maudlin sympathy, advises: “He should close the glaring gap between him and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A strong symbolic step would be for Mr. Obama to travel to Israel to stand side by side with Mr. Netanyahu against a nuclear Iran.” Burns concludes, “An Obama pivot [we’ve already seen the “pivot” to the Pacific to contain and isolate China, carrier battle groups trawling the waters as I write] back to American leadership in the Middle East is not only good politics in a divided Washington, but also the right diplomatic response to reaffirm United States power and purpose on Iran and in a violent, turbulent but still vital Middle East.”

My New York Times Comment on the Burns article, same date, follows:

Nicholas Burns superbly recaptures the mood and substance of American foreign policy at its very worst: aggressive, arrogant, as though America has the right to define and determine the shape of Middle East politics, and by inference, assert its supremacy throughout the world. This is Cold War thinking and planning worthy of Kissinger and Albright (no coincidence he uses “assert”) and goes to extra lengths to ensure Israeli regional dominance, nuclear weapons and all.

If this is Harvard/Kennedy School, as in fact it is, I feel my own Harvard doctorate has been thrown in the mud, soiled, tarnished. Burns’s words come spitting out like a machine gun—all threat, exhibition of power, etc., not a glimmer of inclination toward peace. But he is typical of Obama administration thinking, which is why I consider the Accord, far from better than nothing, deserving of defeat for its revanche-like aspects. Worthy of defeat, to make the situation worse, and thereby further isolate the US for its exaggerated belligerence. Perhaps the other signatories already recognize US moral bankruptcy and break the lockjaw of the embargo and guarantee Iran’s security against US and/or Israeli bombing. Power appears to make bullies of us all. And from bully to tyrant is a short step.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

### **Impunity, Functional Equivalent of Genocide: Collapse of Social Institutions**

The horrific refugee problem we see today, so reminiscent of population movements during World War II, next to the Holocaust itself in the historical annals of Crimes Against Humanity, and

to which it was then related, remains in our times below the moral radar screen as though somehow inevitable, beyond solution, something that just happens. That is how jaded the world has become. Human flotsam, period; humanity, as the central organizing principle of life, stinks in the nostrils of nations preoccupied with other things to do. This is what I mean by the collapse of social institutions, with no guiding hand (where in all of this, e.g., is the UN or some suitable alternative if such were possible?) to prevent the humanitarian crater where a power vacuum reigns and the bottom has dropped out of global responsibility for the lives and dignity of people.

Events (i.e., human suffering) have already gone beyond what self-proclaimed civilization would allow, raising questions about whether or not there is a moral order shaping, defining, underpinning the international political system and its capacity for ensuring, or at least working toward, social justice and even human sustainability. Children and their mother drown, trucks sealed tight become mass graves, ordinary people, their belongings on their backs, pushing baby carriages, marching/walking along railroad tracks—from a descriptive point of view, prelude to World War III? Perhaps not. The world can contain (somewhat) volatility, but does a lousy job at removing the causes of human misery, indeed seems to require such a condition as validation of power and national sovereignty.

Why do present-day actors, starting with alliances, nations, social movements, and corporate units of the great chain of capitalistic being, finally, individuals in their asocial behavior, have and enjoy the capacity to act with impunity—no effective whistles blown, the smugglers of human traffic (impersonalization as seldom seen in recent years) serving as a microcosm of the whole. The world is out of whack, or so we leave matters at that in our collective flight from social responsibility. And still the people come, children clutching parents, no apparent mechanism for welcome, settlement, citizenship. As I describe the Middle East and Europe here, I totally forget the human drama at home, the anti-immigrant feeling if not political hysteria, talk of thousand-mile fences, etc. (Trump did not create but is riding the wave of US xenophobia and ethnocentrism, world diseases the affluent nations practice on their victims.)

Her/his name is Million: the plight of the refugee qua world historical figure revealing both the moral emptiness of global arrangements (including what defines national aspirations—from hegemony and militarism to material striving at others' expense)—to the wretchedness of social conditions driving people from their homes and source of livelihood. In this epochal societal collapse it is not just capitalism's doing—or if it is, socialist countries nevertheless have thus far not offered safe havens to the masses. Russia and China stand as idly by as do countries in the West. Marx was more right than he believed in perhaps his darkest moments: the human being is a commodity cheapened to the last cent. There is enough blame for this happening to pass around.

My own personal take, inflammatory or jaundiced as it may be, starts in the current social crisis with Israel as the epicenter of the Middle East, its own conduct, but also as stalking horse for ensuring American predominance of the region. Had Zionism after World War II sought to respect the rights of the indigenous population of Palestine, had it distilled the Holocaust experience of Evil as mandate for Jewish emancipation directed to the freedom of all peoples, and led by its moral example, in building a Zion open to all, solicitous of the well-being of all, founded in a transcendent brotherhood/sisterhood of love and compassion, all of which was humanly possible, I contend that none of the post-Exodus history would have happened, up to and including no conceivable basis for a Gazan travesty, let alone the rise of ISIS. Yes, blowback, although I find the term simplistic.



Dignity invites reciprocal dignity. What Israel did over the decades was ethnic cleansing of thoroughgoing proportions. This sent shockwaves through the region.

But Israel alone—and yet it never acted alone, always having American military power watching its back, and steadily aided by apartheid South Africa in the development of its nuclear arsenal—cannot be held responsible for the totality of turmoil bringing us to the present. US power politics in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, extending in a still wider arc to Iraq, etc., its military bases in Saudi Arabia, its sought-after control of the Mediterranean and Southern Europe (going back to the Marshall Plan of 1947), these are not negligible factors—to which must be added the militarization of oil, its supply, its control, a tidy package of imperialism, with or without a consideration of Israel, but mostly with—in seeking out the disruptive factors in the Middle East.

From the epicenter to the prevailing circumference, the refugee fills in the historical space. A scene worthy of Torah lamentations—and that, lest I am charged with anti-Semitism—is the point: Zionism as the killer of the dream, militarism as worship of the New Golden Calf, God, to the believer, now in punishment mode, the destruction of the Second Temple redux, misbehavior on a grand scale with respect to the Palestinian people. Yes, Chosen People, but only when deserved, only when being within God's grace, and only when respect is accorded to others. The Jewish State has violated the principles of Judaism, and, in its hubris, expects His protection, forgiveness, and deliverance. (As we approach the High Holydays, it is fitting that Isaiah knew better in this week's Haftarah selection.) But not to get sidetracked, my two points are: the causal chain began with Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and second, the utter vacuity of the (nonexistent) moral conscience of the international order. The UN has proven itself the toothless tiger, or rather pussy cat. Socialist countries could also have done better. But I reserve my scorn for the US and EU as selfish, self-satisfied nations, incapable of human feeling.

Consider the evidence in Rick Lyman's New York Times article, "Treatment of Migrants Evokes Memories of Europe's Darkest Hour," Sept. 4, illustrating the European setting. (Discussion of the US, to follow, treats the longer term context.) In Budapest, a crowded train station, armed police surrounding the refugees, who are herded into trains, lied to, told they were being taken to the Austrian border, and instead a nearby detention camp that a Human Rights Watch official described as a concentration camp. Echoes of World War II, as also, in the Czech Republic, refugees were hustled off a train where police "wrote identification numbers on their hands with indelible markers, stopping only when someone pointed out that this was more than a little like the tattoos the Nazis put on concentration camp inmates." Europe was preparing a warm greeting: "Razor-wire fences rise along national borders in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and France. Many political leaders stoke rising nationalism by portraying the migrants as dangerous outsiders whose foreign cultures and Muslim religion could overwhelm cherished traditional ways." (Transposed to America, the picture would be not unfamiliar.)

Robert Frolich, chief rabbi of Hungary: "It was horrifying when I saw those images of people putting numbers on people's arms. It reminded me of Auschwitz. And then putting people on a train with armed guards to take them to a camp where they are closed in? Of course there are echoes of the Holocaust." The areas involved are the very ones which saw the persecution, what observers see as astonishing historical amnesia. Lyman writes: "Europeans are facing one of the Continent's worst humanitarian crisis since World War II, yet many seem blind to images that recall that blackest time in their history." The reporter denies the genocidal aspects of the events, yet, he points

out, “at the same time, the images may reveal a deeper truth about Europe and its seeming unpreparedness for a crisis so long in the making: While extolling the virtues of human rights and humanism, it remains, in many parts, a place resistant to immigration and diversity.”

Historical forgetfulness? Hypocrisy? Opportunism? Europe has Holocaust memorials in practically every city, Budapest, one of the “most revered memorials... a series of shoes perched along the Danube riverfront... refer[ring] to the World War II massacre of Jews by fascists who forced to take off their shoes and shot them, letting their bodies fall into the river.” Nonetheless, we forget, or turn away—Babar Baloch, of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, stating: “And this memorial, that you cannot walk past without pausing to contemplate, this beautiful memorial, is in the same city where many of these other things are happening now. It’s mind-boggling.” Yes, mind-boggling, and yet the UN and the world sit on their manicured hands and do nothing. Hungary, in fact, goes one better. Friday (Sept.4) its Parliament passed legislation revising refugee laws that would “allow the creation of so-called transit zones along the Serbian border,” confining refugees to these zones, “which must be within 60 meters of the border (about 200 feet), until their cases are resolved, and those cases would have to be decided within eight days, with just three more for possible appeals.” Then, deportation if so decided. Next week a second set of laws is expected, “giving greater authority to the police and the military, including the right to enter any home to search for migrants who might be hiding there.”

I would not want to neglect America in this tragic historical narrative. As what I take to be the number one purveyor of violence in the world, the US bears some responsibility for the casual treatment of death and inurement to human suffering as manifested in this refugee crisis. Drone assassinations, war, intervention, covert action, financial manipulation, as in the banking debacle and use of derivatives (one does not need a gun or a bomb to cause human misery) breathe an atmosphere of cynicism, with silent cues of approval, suspended over our friends and allies in Europe. After all, Putin, reported today, is messing around in Syria. Refugees, in the popular mind, Europe and America, are nonproductive drones whose sole goal is to get on welfare. (A goodly number of the refugees are college educated, and if nothing else, show courage and determination beyond the ordinary. I think Angela Merkel almost alone realizes this.) But if this US complicity seems too indirect, we have the more concrete reality of America’s role of interference in the Middle East which helped release fratricidal bloodshed, regime change, switching sides to fit a short-term conception of American national self-interest.

Simply, the US global posture has no room for thinking about refugees. If the Europeans can’t handle the problem so much the better, renewing their dependence on America and stifling any criticism of US geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis Russia and China. Too, there is oil to be considered, and investment, and boycotts of putative enemies, and uncompromising defense of Israel, and the list keeps growing, all dependent to a greater or lesser extent (depending on the issue) on a weaker, compliant Europe, particularly in providing legitimating cover for what are essentially unilateral acts of power. What happens in Budapest, Prague, or Vienna, if not in iron-clad specificity to American national security interests (and the refugees are expendable in that regard) is of no consequence. Other children and their mothers may drown, miles-long processions along the main rail lines in the march to elsewhere, more reminders of World War II, where some of the practices were first tried and perfected, and with America increasingly the spitting image of Europe in attitude if not yet in practice, why should our leaders and public be involved or concerned. After all,

this is Football Saturday as I write. After all, China is ripe for conquest, after Russia is put in its place. After all, don't we have a refugee problem presently storming the gates of the Great Southwest? After all, haven't we brought enough freedom and democracy to the world, at the sacrifice of every American? They're all losers, we're the winners.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2015

### ***New York Times* and Race: a Possible Breakthrough?**

The New York Times is to be congratulated. In its editorial, *The Architecture of Segregation*, it has discovered racial/minority discrimination in the US. That is a major feat. It requires clear eyes, an open mind, etc., not noticeable attributes, except perhaps in national-security reporting, of the paper. Yet, because the topic veers dangerously close to asking about the nature of capitalism and whether it systemically (i.e., purposely and purposefully) degrades its people, a preliminary discussion—before reviewing the editorial—is, I think, in order. We seldom view America specifically in terms of capitalism, let alone capitalist development in its mature (aka, senile) form.

Race had always been an integral feature of American capitalism, of course the two centuries of slavery, which from the earliest moment added a feudalistic structural dimension to capitalism in America that nullified the growth of laissez-faire and historically contributed to corporatism in post-slavery times—the conjoining, in ways large and small, of race and the stabilization of the consolidation of wealth. Even by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, race effectively kept the lower classes divided, which has become an ingrained ideological principle to this day. But race also has had more far-reaching application. It has become code for a particular mental-set of great utility.

I refer to ethnocentrism and xenophobia, legitimating factors in distinguishing Americans as superior to other peoples and affording their right to a unilateral course of world dominance. Race validates inequality, at home and acting abroad. To eradicate racism is a dangerous step, given US capitalism's historical-psychological associations with racism as the cutting edge of a proto-fascistic tendency or inclination, dangerous except when selected members of the racial group can be groomed to serve—however condescending and skillful the effort—the interests of the dominant socioeconomic tier of power. Enter Barack Obama, the ideal servant of power; not Stepin Fetchit, but one who melds smoothly in Pentagon and Wall Street circles, willingly able to preside over war, intervention, covert action, regime change, and, conveniently directed against persons of color, as a means of demonstrating loyalty to America over race-identity, drone assassination. As Sartre said of the anti-Semite, if there were no Jews the anti-Semite would have to invent them, so in America, among ruling groups, if there were no Obama they would have to invent him, so well does he fulfill the the function of comprador for US elites.

Race has been turned in on itself through selective recruitment, widening still further the gulf between blacks and the white majority. This would never have worked had Dr. King not been assassinated, for his Poor People's Campaign was on to the whole historical travesty including the underlying role of economics in keeping blacks a subordinate class. The New York Times doesn't get its hands dirtied by entering the realm of generic exploitation; "all the news that's fit to print" stops at the water's edge of capitalism. (When I said above, national-security matters, I meant surveillance, NSA, Snowden revelations, not militarism and America's war/intervention record.) What it does now, yes, to its credit, is to recognize the self-replenishing springs of poverty, attaches

that social dynamic to race, and sees race as code for the inclusion of Hispanics as well. The Architecture of Segregation is aptly titled. What we won't find is the Architecture of Imperialism, which bears a close relation to the other topic. I say, "breakthrough," then, so as not to be discouraging. The insights from the editorial could be expanded into other areas, corporatism, militarism, as well as the structuring of discrimination as a key to America's class system.

Non-enforcement of integration, The Times points out that HUD was created fifty years ago and the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968, has been the rule, so that "the interlinked scourges of housing discrimination and racial segregation in America is far from finished." If anything, the situation, it correctly notes, has deteriorated: "Economic isolation is actually growing worse across the country, as more and more minority families find themselves trapped in high-poverty neighborhoods without decent housing, schools or jobs, and with few avenues of escape." We tend not to think of housing as the critical factor, yet when neighborhood-formation is factored in, with the panoply of public services integral to it, whatever is substandard—"housing, schools or jobs"—has cumulative effect. Here The Times partly acknowledges systemic issues, if not capitalism, then at least current policy: "This did not happen by accident. It is a direct consequence of federal, state and local housing policies that encourage—indeed, subsidize—racial and economic segregation."

Despite recent favorable Court decisions, the editorial states that "there will be no fundamental change without the dismantling of policies that isolate the poor," and adds, "[a]s things stand now, federally subsidized housing for low-income citizens, which seems on its face to be a good thing, is disproportionately built in poor areas offering no work, underperforming schools and limited opportunity." Zoning becomes critical; newer suburbs, "benefit[ing] from infrastructure built with public subsidies," have laws which "prevent poor, moderate-income and minority families from moving in." The prosperity of the '90s, higher wages, lower unemployment, was thought to have broken the cycle, but "the number of people living in high-poverty slums, where 40 percent or more of the residents live below the poverty level, has nearly doubled since 2000." And with that, "poverty has become more concentrated" among blacks and Hispanics (1 in 4, 1 in 6, in these neighborhoods, as compared with 1 in 13 among whites).

The Times quotes Walter Mondale, former vice president and co-sponsor of the Housing Act, who spoke last week at a HUD conference: "When high-income black families cannot qualify for a prime loan and are steered away from white suburbs, the goals of the Fair Housing Act are not fulfilled. When the federal and state governments will pay to build new suburban highways, streets, sewers, schools and parks, but then allow these communities to exclude affordable housing and nonwhite citizens, the goals of the Fair Housing Act are not fulfilled. When we build most new subsidized housing in poor black or Latino neighborhoods, the goals of the Fair Housing Act are not fulfilled." The selective process which fuels capitalism through channeling allocations to favor the already wealthy (and largely white) tends to raise economic causation into a racial factor, indeed, the perpetuation of a racial framework while losing sight of its foundations. Monopoly capital + race makes for a heady brew. When all is said and done, I hope to see, but know I never shall, an NYT editorial entitled, "The Architecture of Fascism."

My New York Times Comment to the Editorial, same date, follows:

Thank you NYT for puncturing America's complacent surface to apprehend what occurs underneath, a violently skewed favoritism to upper social groups which favors

discrimination and widens the stratification gap. I'm tired of hearing about the 1 % (itself misleadingly suggesting a ruling class of three million, when the figure is closer to 0001%), the editorial shedding more light on reality than the political slogans.

What emerges from the editorial is not only substandard conditions but also across-the-board diminishment of opportunity: poorer schools, healthful surroundings, public services, so that the gap cannot help but widen. Is this intentional? I say, yes; racism is alive and well, making a steady comeback since the death of Dr. King.

Moreover, current evidence of widespread ethnocentrism and xenophobia, as in the strong anti-immigrant sentiment, bodes poorly for genuine reform. Your editorial was therefore that much more needed, as a wake-up call to the non-observance of laws already on the books, to the decades'-long trend in the allocation of taxpayer dollars, and of course the hardening of sentiment away from compassion or even the recognition of human suffering.

Poverty is incompatible with democracy. By reinforcing poverty, democracy is further denied. What perhaps NYT should add, as a practical matter, is to excoriate current levels of defense spending, as robbing the nation of a vital social safety net as well as true livability for its people.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2015

### **The Political Obscenity of Trump: Personalization of a Nation**

Ignorance is bliss—shrewdness is commendable—proto-fascism is “in.” As in totalitarian societies, Americans admire strength, certitude, in politics, the Leadership Principle. Germany, post-Weimar, is a prime example. America has not quite seen anything like it before, not because there were not candidates standing in the wings, Douglas MacArthur for one, but because the personality breakdown of the citizenry was not quite sufficiently ripe as yet. Today it is. However much Trump may think himself a self-invented powerhouse and genius, the secret of his appeal lies in a febrile populace craving direction principally of a reactionary kind. War, intervention, covert action, regime change, social paralysis with respect to differentiation of wealth and power, abidance by racial mores, albeit more latent than overtly expressed, centuries old—all perfectly acceptable. Not only acceptable, necessary to the maintenance of the American Way of Life.

Trump's self-invention, with parental assistance, came early, military schooling firming up the process, the Wharton School providing a capitalist imprimatur, a lifestyle of self-indulgence solidifying a personal identity of entitlement. To the manor born—the quintessential American successfully fusing militarism, capitalism, and individualism into the homespun behemoth capable, as in his campaign mantra, of Making America Great Again, for a people bashed by, yet laying at the feet of, a political economy itself amalgamating luxury, consumerism, and human misery. Through personalizing himself and widely used as The Donald (like Teddy rather than Theodore Roosevelt), he has a ready-made mark of endearment to hide his corporatist and war provoking tendencies (also like TR).

Here let's look at Michael Barbaro's article in the New York Times, “Donald Trump Likens His Schooling to Military Service in Book,” (Sept. 8), the book in question, Michael D'Antonio's

biography of Trump, “Never Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success,” to which the reporter had access to an advanced copy (publication date, Sept. 22). Barbaro immediately reveals Trump’s penchant for fantasy and exaggeration: He told D’Antonio that although he received draft deferments during Vietnam, he “‘always felt that I was in the military’ because of his education at a military-themed boarding school.” The New York Military Academy, “an expensive prep school where his parents had sent him [even granting subsequent inflation, today’s tuition is \$31,000.] to correct poor behavior, gave him ‘more training militarily than a lot of the guys that go into the military.’”

According to the book, “Trump emerges as a man largely unchanged from his childhood in the wealthy Queens neighborhood of Jamaica Estates, where an exacting father, Fred Trump, schooled him in the ways of self-promotion and encouraged a lifetime of fighting. The senior Mr. Trump, a major real estate developer, counseled his son to ‘be a killer’ and told him, ‘You are a king.’” Trump himself proved an apt pupil, recalling to the book’s author, “‘when I look at myself in the first grade and I look at myself now, I’m basically the same. The temperament is not that different.’” (Infantile, tough guy, killer instinct?—hardly to be proud of.) His Academy mentor called him “‘a conniver even then,’” in reference to his “preoccupation with winning—at anything and everything, big or small.” Hence, Trump “‘just wanted to be first, in everything, and he wanted people to know he was first.’” The man has a real ego-problem, and I wonder how this would translate into observance of the Constitution, toleration of dissent, and foreign-policy planning and execution.

Trump’s former wives deserve honorary Harvard doctorates for their appraisal of the man. His second wife told D’Antonio, “‘The little boy still wants attention,’” while the first observed, “‘He wants to be noticed,’” and then related how he went into a fit in Aspen when she skied past him. “‘He could not take it, that I could do something better than he did.’” Barbaro writes: “Mr. Trump stopped, took off his skies and walked off the trail.” (Should Trump win, I don’t look forward to his meeting with Putin.) Nor, moving from the personal to the political (in its broad sense), here his views on the military, does one have grounds for confidence. Dwelling on his military-school experience, Trump was rapturous: “‘After the Vietnam War, all those military academies lost ground because people really disrespected the military. They weren’t sending their kids to military school. It was a whole different thing, but in those days—1964 I graduated—that was a very good thing or tough thing, and it was a real way of life at military academy.’” This was quite revealing; we could expect patriotism-by-the-yard, perhaps even the militarization of public education.

One cannot but credit him with being a sort of right-wing Mark Twain with his aphorisms, which on inspection though are hardly humorous. To Playboy—on seeking publicity: “The show is Trump and it’s sold out performances everywhere.” To D’Antonio—on feeling superior: “For the most part, you can’t respect people because most people aren’t worthy of respect.” And to Time—on the value of self-reflection: “When you start studying yourself too deeply, you start seeing things that maybe you don’t want to see.” To which he added, in a flash of insight: “‘And if there’s a rhyme and a reason, people can figure you out, and once they figure you out, you’re in big trouble.’” Thus far, this hasn’t happened. If and when it does, it may be too late.

My New York Times Comment to the Barbaro article, same date, follows:

Trump's candidacy reveals the authoritarian dimensions of the American mindset: he faithfully captures the value system in its social Darwinist content going back to the 1890s, dangerously elitist in both its domestic and foreign policy implications. When we asked (of Nixon), would you buy a used car from this man?, the question for Trump is: would you want this man's finger on the nuclear trigger? Macho international politics is serious enough; compound that with implicit racism and unguarded elitism domestically and you have a heady brew quite unlike anything seen at this level before. That he is known via the personalization of the self—The Donald—only raises more clearly authoritarian dimensions to his policies. I tremble at the thought of a Trump presidency.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2015

### **Greece at the Cross-Roads: A Test Case of Austerity**

Austerity entails sacrifice. It suggests an ascetic mental cast and, perhaps secondarily, enforced or extreme economy (Webster's). Speaking personally, I have always favored an ascetic cast of mind as the ultimate negation of conspicuous consumption, and beyond, a dependence on consumerism as a principal mode of class identity, and a gut-addiction to luxury, as diversion from the real world of living. The ascetic cast is absolutely essential to a gracious view of Nature and respect for the environment. And it also rules out militarism as incompatible with a nation's servicing of the basic needs of its people. Asceticism promotes sharing and conserving of scarce resources and, be it said, a spiritual cleanliness not cluttered with status needs and consideration. So much on the positive side. But what happens when what I take to be a moral category of human belief and conduct has become politicized to favor exactly the opposite societal results? For austerity has been the tool of upper groups to fasten poverty on the remainder, a bone-dry social system devoid of everything from progressive taxation and enforced business regulation to a vibrant social safety net—all in the vacuous name of balanced budgets.

Austerity is the battering ram of plutocracy to enhance its own wealth and subjugate working people and the poor to unfulfilled lives often coming down to human social misery. It is a class weapon of power, a means, thoroughly respectable at that, of promoting class differentiation and wealth concentration. Not unexpectedly, it is the method of choice of the IMF, World Bank, EU, and, standing behind all three, the US (though meant to apply to others more than to itself). It is legitimation in its nastiest form, meant to seal a hierarchical order in place at the expense of its most deprived members. Within the EU, Greece became the designated victim, i.e., sacrificial lamb, to justify a malicious economic policy-construct pointing the way to where capitalist development was heading: greater inequality through enforced strict ground rules that favor corporatist goals of financial-business hegemony over governments and peoples.

These thoughts are occasioned by Yanis Varoufakis's op.-ed. article in the New York Times, *How Europe Crushed Greece*, (Sept. 9), in which an acknowledged Left voice, anti-austerity critic bar none, who nonetheless may be sending a mixed signal about a solution to Greece's debt problem. He writes, "Since the beginning of Greece's financial crisis in 2010, two prime ministers have been swept from office after they were forced to adopt an unfeasible package of austerity measures in exchange for a bailout from the troika.... It pains me to watch the same fate befall a third prime minister, my friend and comrade Alexis Tsipras." Actually he had been quite critical of

Tsipras when he capitulated to the demands, here however calling it “forced,” while still acknowledging that this “caused a split in our party, Syriza, [my CP article at the time coming down hard on Tsipras as a compromiser], between those who reluctantly agreed to implement the program and the rest of us (approximately 40 Syriza members of Parliament, out of a total of 149) who did not.” A new general election is scheduled for Sept. 20.

Varoufakis has clean hands; he resigned as finance minister “over the troika’s ruthless, humiliating imposition,” and will not stand for Parliament this time, seeing it as incapable “of endorsing a realistic reform agenda for Greece.” Nor will he “support the adoption of a troika program that everyone knows is destined to fail.” So far so good. Yet he de-fangs the tiger, a significant strategic easing of the threat: “I will not, however, join those who think that exiting the Eurozone, to bring about a major devaluation with a reintroduced drachma, is in itself a program for Greece’s recovery.” Hard to know what he most objects to, the exit or the major devaluation of the drachma—which in exiting the EU may not require a drastic devaluation. Sovereign control over the nation’s currency alone, I surmise, would work to Greece’s advantage and oppose unwanted austerity measures imposed from without. It is one thing to be part of a currency union, another to accept dictation from a supra-authority prejudicial to the nation’s internal needs (especially in light of globalization, multinationals, mega-financial operations).

Varoufakis, referring to “the eurozone’s existential crisis,” a rather high-flown characterization of a fairly straightforward policy choice, that between modeling the euro “on the international gold standard of the interwar period or on a sovereign currency, like the dollar,” alternatively, as represented by Germany and by France, establishes the context for the plight in which Greece finds itself. He explains the difference, implying the presumed quandary in which the EU finds itself. On one hand, “The gold standard relied on strict rules that were unenforceable during a crisis. In a severe downturn, these imposed the greatest burden on the worst-hit economies and thus made exit the only alternative to a humanitarian crisis. [Varoufakis is opposed to this alternative, yet rejects the logical response—exit.] This is the reason that President Franklin D. Roosevelt took the United States off the gold standard in 1933, expanded the money supply and helped pull America out of the Depression.” On the other hand, more briefly, “A sovereign currency, or state money, demands a different, more flexible set of responses based on political union, as the French government and others have recently proposed. The great questions that Europe must answer are: What kind of political union do we want? And are we prepared to act quickly enough to prevent the fragmentation of the eurozone?”

This is troubling. Why a political union in the first place, particularly from a Left perspective, when (a) a superior authority is going to define and implement rules, narrowly capitalistic, that weaken the society’s democratic and welfare dimensions—which in Europe’s case, as a practical matter, goes beyond the kind of political union to a recognition of Germany’s own economic ascendancy not shared by, say, Greece, and (b) the shadow of the military alliance hangs over whatever kind of political union is envisioned. In sum, Varoufakis is either evasive or superficial—by rejecting exit out of hand. My sense is that the EU, in the way it has been set up, is inherently unable to achieve democratization of its internal structure given the influences acting upon it. Alternative? This may seem far-fetched, but why should not Greece break its EU dependence and look for assistance in trade and investment to Russia and China! Of course, the roof would fall in, not least because breaking ranks might encourage other EU members similarly situated to do the



same, and more basic, start the additional unravelling of NATO as well. So, from this corner, Varoufakis appears timid too a fault, occupying a position somewhere down the middle wracked by “the eurozone’s existential crisis.”

He writes, ascribing to the non-rules-based economy a degree of autonomy (France) greater than that afforded by a rules-based one (Germany), when neither one offers exemption from austerity, which, one suspects, resides in political union where power is not, and would not be, equally distributed: “Europe’s indecision is a result of a deep rift between Berlin and Paris. Berlin has traditionally backed a rules-based Eurozone in which every member state is responsible for its own finances, including bank bailouts, with political union limited to a fiscal overlord’s possessing veto power over national budgets that violate the rules.” [From here “responsible for its own”—this looks like pseudo-sovereignty, with the “fiscal overlord’s” veto power determinative.] By contrast, “Paris and Rome, cognizant that their deficit position would condemn them to a slow-burning recession under such a rules-based political union, see things differently.” Germany would not accept an alternative to the troika plan, here he is correct, because it would weaken its hand in relation to the French. One cannot help but sympathize, however short of expectations the analysis: “Thus little Greece was crushed while the elephants tussled.”

Varoufakis did have a counter plan, but with Jeffrey Sachs, Larry Summers, and Norman Lamont (former British Chancellor of the Exchequer) as advisers, one can be pardoned for not being impressed. Based on debt swaps “to reduce the public debt’s burden on state finances,” in turn “render[ing] Greek sovereign debt eligible for the European Central Bank’s quantitative easing program,” we see the renewal on the same institutions (ECB) which helped bring Greece down in the first place. He also wants—entering the never-never land of privatization—“to generate homegrown investment” through propos[ing] a development bank to take over public assets from the state, collateralize them and so create an income stream for reinvestment.” If Syriza is the Left of the Left, let’s have no further illusions about Greek socialism. Bravely, he calls for the EU to make “the transition from ‘We the states’ to ‘We the European people.’” I would like to see more.

My New York Times Comment to the Varoufakis article, same date, follows:

I find Varoufakis’s citing of FDR going off the gold standard a convincing point for rejecting the German/troika strict-rules-based standard as most discriminatory to Greece and other weaker EU countries and economies. There is obviously something fallacious about the assumptions underpinning the EU. (Yet I’m perplexed that Varoufakis looks to Sachs and Summers for advice, which doesn’t go along with his critique of austerity.) How much is the EU meant to be a true political union, even granting US, IMF, and World Bank influence, and how much merely the political-economic foundation for NATO, a military alliance system positioned to confront and challenge Russia?

That is a serious question, I think, because the EU nations are forced into an austerity framework, against their better interests, in order to support a US-inspired revival of the Cold War. Here foreign-policy goals trump that of rational international-economic organization. Yes, Greece is caught in a squeeze, as Varoufakis suggests, but how nice, I believe, if it left the eurozone (just as FDR acted at the London Economic Conference), and was followed by others—a significant improvement in their economic futures plus an important nod to detente and diminished tensions.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

## **Obama-ism, the New McCarthyism: Witch-hunt at Temple**

The scene, Fall 1951, the principal, John Reynolds, M.A. Harvard, '39, assistant professor of ancient history, University of Florida, a speck, lost to memory, in the mammoth national attack on civil liberties in those early heightened times of the Cold War in America. Reynolds, slight of build, silver-wire glasses, son of a prominent Pennsylvania Republican family, non-political, father of youngsters in a Gainesville grammar school—not the stuff of high drama, hence, again forgotten by, lost in the shuffle of, history. Reynolds was subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee in Washington to answer questions about being a member of the Teachers College Union at Harvard before the war. He was a cooperative witness, not in the sense of naming names, but his simple, unassuming, direct ways and obviously unthreatening demeanor and record, nowhere endangering the security of the United States, won over the Committee and he was given a clean bill of health.

Reynolds returned to Gainesville by train, and at the stop in Jacksonville he got off to get the local paper, the Times-Union, where on the front page he found himself, in an enlarged photo at the witness table, under the banner headline, “John Reynolds, U of F Professor, Fired,” it apparently being sufficient to be called up, whatever the truth of allegations about subversion, etc., to warrant dismissal. No university hearing, no independent investigation, the stigma of being subpoenaed enough—isolated, ostracized, his children at school ridiculed, denounced. Soon Mr. Reynolds left the community, swallowed in the maw of a red-baiting age of hysteria and conformity.

I was 18, an entering freshman, already on a minor scale acquainted with the cultural scene, having, as a high-school student, supported Henry Wallace in '48, and then Claude Pepper against George Smathers in 1950, the former leading to my denunciation in open class in 10th grade World History, the latter, as a senior, summoned by the assistant dean of students and told to watch my step. (I ran for vice-president in the student body election on the campaign issue—no one else had campaign issues—of racially integrating the schools in Dade County.) From some village hamlet out of Faulkner or Capote? Hardly, this was Miami Beach Senior High, tops in academics, student body 95% Jewish, fellow students like Sandy Weill and Robert Rubin—a pretty sophisticated place (except for the teachers). But this was 1948-51, a chilling period for the overt silencing of dissent.

Fast-forward now to 2015, déjà vu all over again (thanks Yogi) except that anticommunism never left the scene, and with it the narrowing of permissible boundaries of political discussion, an America drawing inward, somewhat more sophisticated, less raw, less overt, than earlier, but the steady progression then until now in discouraging free thought and, yes, still watchful about and punishing dissent. (I was eased out of Yale as assistant professor in the early 1960s because of antiwar and civil-rights involvement—the history department a bastion of reaction.) The country is so used to the tightening of opinion, marking an ever-moving Rightward shift of the political spectrum, so that today's Democrats, a party of war and haute financial-industrial capitalism worthy of the Republicans of yesteryear, themselves now considerably worse than before, is illustrated by the National Security Agency's program of massive surveillance under Obama's tutelage and orders. The buck stops here; he cannot exempt himself from responsibility for the most widespread violation of civil liberties in US history, less dramatic than the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Palmer Raids, HUAC, but more lethal in its technological advancement and, of course, its very presence cautioning one to stop, think, and check oneself for fear of Big Brother listening in. The breadth of

political discourse in America is shocking, as witness the current candidates of both parties for the presidency. I include Sanders's shabby foreign-policy record, an utter sham!

Instead of John Reynolds we have Xi Xiaoxing, instead of the University of Florida we have Temple University, instead of history we have physics, instead of 1951 we have 2015, yet the flow of the American structural-ideological narrative is essentially the same, a constant of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, antiradicalism, proclivity to war, only now, the transition from hating and fearing Russia to hating and fearing China, Obama's bete noire as in his Pacific-first militarism and Trans-Pacific Partnership (though Russia is not forgotten in the process). I turn then to New York Times reporter Matt Apuzzo's excellent article, "U.S. Drops Charges That Professor Shared Technology With China," (Sept. 12), note, technology, not espionage and stealing atomic secrets, as charged against Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, but technology: All hail, under Obama, private enterprise, the holy grail—not as quest but chief certitude in place—of the American mindset. Apuzzo begins: "When the Justice Department arrested the chairman of Temple University's physics department this spring and accused him of sharing sensitive American-made technology with China, prosecutors had what seemed like a damning piece of evidence: schematics of sophisticated laboratory equipment sent by the professor, Xi Xiaoxing, to scientists in China." Arrest last spring, the dropping of charges Friday (Sept. 11). In between, a veritable hell.

The subversive brouhaha, if we can call it that, for the uproar was more pernicious: "The schematics, prosecutors said, revealed the design of a device known as a pocket heater. The equipment is used in superconductor research, and Dr. Xi had signed an agreement promising to keep its design a secret." Even were he at fault (it turns out he was not), that hardly warranted his treatment: "But months later, long after federal agents had led Dr. Xi away in handcuffs, independent experts discovered something wrong with the evidence at the heart of the Justice Department's case: The blueprints were not for a pocket heater." Xi had violated no agreement—we go from brouhaha to fiasco, nothing criminal (one wonders at the scope and content of this week's announcement that the Justice Department is going after white-collar crime, probably shared business research especially with regard to China, not financial improprieties), still though handcuffs.

Apuzzo continues; we see the utter shoddiness of the government's case, compounded no doubt by the fact that Obama's obsession, China, has been brought in: "Faced with sworn statements from leading scientists, including an inventor of the pocket heater, the Justice Department on Friday afternoon dropped all charges against Dr. Xi, an American citizen. [He came to the US in 1989 and was subsequently naturalized.] It was an embarrassing acknowledgment that prosecutors and F.B.I. agents did not understand—and did not do enough to learn—the science at the heart of the case before bringing charges that jeopardized Dr. Xi's career and left the impression that he was spying for China." And Xi's own response, in a telephone interview with the reporter: "I don't expect them to understand everything I do. But the fact that they don't consult with experts and then charge me? Put my family through all this? Damage my reputation? They shouldn't do this. This is not a joke. This is not a game." I can hear Mr. Reynolds's voice as I write this. No, put my family through all this, damage my reputation, this is not a game. We circulated a petition, headed "Fair Shake for Mr. Reynolds," when he was fired. It did no good.

Here Apuzzo is right on target: "The United States faces an onslaught from outside hackers and inside employees trying to steal government and corporate secrets. [Perhaps an exaggeration, but

from there his emphasis is clear.] President Obama's strategy to combat it involves aggressive espionage investigations and prosecutions, as well as increased cyberdefenses. But Dr. Xi's case, coming on the heels of a similar case that was dismissed a few months ago in Ohio, raises questions about whether the Justice Department, in its rush to find Chinese spies, is ensnaring innocent American citizens of Chinese ancestry." I will return to the "similar case" at the close—the same features, a wild charge, Chinese ancestry, etc., and in fact Xi's attorney, Peter Zeidenberg, also represented Sherry Chen, a government hydrologist also charged with "economic espionage" (a chilling phrase) and after a lengthy process released.

Can the president plead ignorance of detailed DOJ/FBI operations? I don't think so. The Obama Vendetta against all (capitalistic-related) things pertaining to China, not only TPP but the extensive investigations and prosecutions concerning economic espionage, should be too well-known to hide. On the Xi case, the government filing was worded so that it could "file the charges again if it chooses." Moreover, "A spokesman for John P. Carlin, the assistant attorney general who is overseeing the crackdown on economic espionage, had no comment on whether Justice Department officials in Washington [the US Attorney in Philadelphia had brought the charges] reviewed the case." The science in Xi's case was complex, but Zeidenberg, himself a longtime government prosecutor now with Arent Fox, noted that "despite the complexity, it appeared that the government never consulted with experts [a bad habit, as in the Chen case] before taking the case to a grand jury. As a result, prosecutors misconstrued the evidence, he said." Did I say, Obama Vendetta, perhaps more like Obama Rampage. For Zeidenberg further said "he understood that agents felt intense pressure to crack down on Chinese espionage but the authorities in these cases [he includes Chen] appeared to have been too quick to assume that their suspicions were justified."

How many are lucky enough to have Zeidenberg to defend them? The cases brought by the government now number in the hundreds (with little public awareness of what is going on). And the charge of economic espionage sticks in the craw because it connotes more than the economic/industrial kind, and rather disloyalty to government and nation. Obama plays that card skillfully. Exempt him from responsibility? US prosecutors even charged a Chinese worker with stealing secrets about "the pigment used to whiten Oreo cookie cream." (To paraphrase Joseph Welsh at the Army-McCarthy hearings, hath American business no shame in running down those who pursue trade secrets?) Zeidenberg stated that Xi's emails to scientists in China "represented the kind of international academic collaboration that governments and universities encourage. The technology discussed was not sensitive or restricted, he said. 'If he was Canadian-American or French-American, or he was from the U.K., would this have ever even got on the government's radar? I don't think so.'" Apuzzo adds, "Other researchers and academics are being closely watched." By happenstance, they mostly seem to be Chinese.

So what happened in this case? "About a dozen F.B.I. agents, some with guns drawn, stormed Dr. Xi's home in the Philadelphia suburbs in May, searching his house just after dawn, he [Zeidenberg] said. His two daughters and his wife watched the agents take him away in handcuffs on fraud charges." Xi's understated comment: "Unfortunately I think this is influenced by the politics of the time. But I think it's wrong. We Chinese-Americans, we contribute to the country, to the national security, to everything." Temple, like Florida, "put him on administrative leave [except that UF fired Reynolds] and took away his title as chairman of the physics department. He was given strict rules about who at the school he could talk to. He said that made it impossible for

him to continue working on a long-running research project that was nearing completion.” Xi fought back, many simply disappear, the odds so much against them. In Xi’s case, his lawyers reviewed the government’s evidence and only then did he understand what had happened: “When I read it, I knew they were mixing things up.” The lawyers “contacted independent scientists and showed them the diagram that the Justice Department said was the pocket heater. The scientists agreed it was not.” Ward Ruby was particularly convincing: “I am very familiar with this device, as I am one of the co-inventors.”

After Zeidenberg made “a presentation for prosecutors and explained the science,” and “gave them sworn statements from the experts and implored the Justice Department to consult with a physicist before taking the case any further,” DOJ conditionally dropped the case. As for Xi, he “choked back tears as he described an ordeal that was agonizing for his family. ‘I barely came out of this nightmare,’ he said.” One can appreciate the continuities in America’s mental warping, and why it should be so easy—though comparatively few share this view—to loathe Obama.

I turn briefly to Nicole Perlroth’s article in *The Times*, “Accused of Spying for China, Until She Wasn’t,” May 9, about Sherry Chen, a US government hydrologist in Ohio, arrested last October and accused of economic espionage, which made, not the front page, but only the “Business Day” section. Although in the throes of massive surveillance, and increasing arrests, the nation was in blissful ignorance—not that it cared (!)—about the Chens and Xis handcuffed and carried away. Same new, same new. “On Monday, Oct. 20, 2014,” Perlroth writes, “Sherry Chen drove, as usual, to her office at the National Weather Service in Wilmington Ohio, where she forecast flood threats along the Ohio River. She was a bit jet-lagged, having returned a few days earlier from a visit to China.” Another ordinary day, she thought. “Then her boss summoned her. Once inside his office, a back door opened and in walked six agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.” No, not a Hollywood movie, but Wilmington, Ohio, for god’s sake. A naturalized US citizen, “Mrs. Chen, 59, an adoptive Midwesterner who had received awards for her government service, was now suspected of being a Chinese spy.” The charge: “using a stolen password to download information about the nation’s dams and of lying about meeting with a high-ranking Chinese official.”

Apparently standard operating procedure—handcuffed, marched past co-workers, whisked away, the reporter continues, “to a federal courthouse 40 miles away in Dayton, where she was told she faced 25 years in prison and \$1 million in fines.” The details are bone-crushing. Chen’s “life went into a tailspin.” Suspended from work without pay, co-workers and friends “afraid to visit,” “television news trucks parked outside her house, waiting to spot a foreign spy hiding in plain sight in suburban Wilmington, population 12,500.” Like Xi, her personal plight was almost too much to bear, as she relates in a recent interview: “I could not sleep. I could not eat. I did nothing but cry for days.” And like Kafka, the order suddenly ends, without explanation. Five months later, just before scheduled to go to trial, the government dropped all charges.

What can be made of this? The spokeswoman for the US Attorney, Southern District of Ohio, simply said, “We are exercising our prosecutorial discretion,” as she quickly added that DOJ filed in 2014 400 indictments and criminal informations (the latter, “charges filed in connection with plea agreements”), only 13, including Chen’s, dismissed. Obama’s hand, and specifically economic so-called espionage, easy to detect, Perlroth writes that the US Attorney “would not comment on the investigation, but there is little question that law enforcement is facing new pressure to pursue any lead that could be related to trade-secret theft.” Not atomic secrets; instead, trade-secret theft,

Obama as the captain of the Swiss Guard of the Vested Interests. In 2013 he, and AG Holder, already laid out the campaign, “aggressive investigations and prosecutions,” particularly DOJ “prosecutions under the Economic Espionage Act [which] jumped more than 30 percent from the year before,” and in the first three-quarters of ’14 another 33 percent, the majority of indictments concerning China.

Perlroth has it right: “It was in this climate that prosecutors zeroed in on Mrs. Chen.” One thinks of the Red Scare under Wilson, with a different cast of characters under Obama. This can be seen by a comment of Peter Toren, another former federal prosecutor, now with Weisbrod Matteis & Copley, specializing in computer crimes: “They came across a person of Chinese descent and a little bit of evidence that they [sic] may have been trying to benefit the Chinese government, but it’s clear there was a little bit of Red Scare and racism involved.” The reporter concludes, after a careful review of court filings and Chen’s emails, that “prosecutors hunted for evidence of espionage, failed and settled on lesser charges that they eventually dropped.” As for espionage and contacting a high Chinese official, the charges are beyond ludicrous—and the US government should have known that. But under Obama the Red Scare becomes the Yellow Peril, actually a two-fer in that he is positioning the US to confront both China and Russia simultaneously. His legacy will be, not the Iran nuclear negotiations, but an accelerated Cold War, with intervention, covert action, and attempted trade-financial strangulation initial weapons of choice. (Don’t ask what lies in reserve.)

Chen was so conscientious that she developed “carpel-tunnel syndrome in her right hand from eight years of repetitive mouse clicks,” for determining water levels and rainfall in building her forecasting model about Ohio River flooding. In her annual visits to China to see her parents, she was asked by a nephew in 2012 for help on “a payment dispute with provincial officials over a water pipeline,” which led to her meeting with a former classmate, now an official with China’s Ministry of Water Resources (a 15-minute chat about interceding on behalf of her nephew); from there they discussed repairs, comparing experiences, on “aging reservoir systems,” the official curious about how projects in the US were funded. Chen didn’t know, but made a study of funding. The account is too detailed, except to say that in answering his emails (two in all) through making inquiry at the Army Corps of Engineers, she was reported as having contacted the Corps to collect “water control manuals on behalf of a foreign interest.” The rest, as we say, is history, handcuffs, a search warrant for her work and email records; on using a stolen password to access a database on dams open to the public, her own expired, she asked a co-worker for his. No information of use was found, her former classmate in China never wrote again, and she still did not know if he ever helped her nephew. The Feds relentlessly pursued the case; in her appearance at Dayton she was charged with four felonies. To which were later added others, including the last year she saw her classmate: “The false statement referred to telling the agents that she had last seen Mr. Jiao in 2011, not 2012.” Fortunately, Zeidenberg gathered all of the evidence and won dismissal of the case.

My New York Times Comment on the Apuzzo article, same date, follows:

McCarthyism redux. Obama, the civil libertarian (?) is obviously to blame for his zeal in prosecuting anyone, however wrongly construed, who can be thought to favor China. This case is at one with the larger context of massive surveillance of the American people. Why worry about Trump and the other Republicans when Obama and his Justice Department are amply prepared to mount persecutory sweeps intended to set the tone for conformity at

home and confrontation with Russia and China abroad. Obama-ism displaces McCarthyism as the psychopathology of this generation.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

### **Cyberwarfare, American Style: Domestic Surveillance/Liberal Repression**

Obama's complaints of cyberattacks by China and Iran threatening US intellectual property and, presumably, national security, conveniently dodges the fact, for it is a fact, that America has used its National Security Agency and other intelligence sources (most of which, like NSA itself, outside the public's knowledge and attention) to provide for massive surveillance at home and a worldwide coverage of spying abroad. Yet we complain of a one-sided onslaught against the Beloved Homeland, one of Obama's talking points to obfuscate—the good old radical word that appears to have fallen into disuse—a global posture of counterrevolution by any and all means possible. Methinks he whines too much, steadily throughout his presidency as background static to intensify the Cold War, but in the last few days timed to coincide with the Xi visit to the US to ensure hostility toward China will continue and expand.

Cyberwarfare may be the wave of the future in international relations, but it seems to me the pretext for resort to conventional geopolitical strategy in establishing America's hegemonic goals, as here in the burgeoning confrontation with China. Obama more than his predecessors is a control freak turning civil liberties on its head as well as, e.g., eavesdropping on Merkel, the respect for privacy. He knows no boundaries to the definition of national self-interest, which is for him made up of equal parts: capitalism and militarism. The synthesis of the two, under the rubric of liberalism, constitutes much of his legacy. Why liberalism? Under Obama it shows its true face, for liberalism, historically and philosophically, must be counterpoised to radicalism, not on the same continuum, nor even to absorb/coopt radicalism, but antithetical to it as translated into societal terms and the nature of the individual. For starters, consider C.B. Macpherson's concept of "possessive individualism," which captures the salience of liberalism.

Liberalism is the smiling face of capitalism, accentuating profit motivation under the name of individualism as meanwhile inexorable forces of structural integration (government-business interpenetration) and economic concentration of wealth and power continue unabated. The test of liberalism is its attachment to an ethos of property acquisition in the name of liberty, which in the US, as Louis Hartz's "Liberal Tradition in America" shows, derives from its Lockean antecedents as a distilled form of purist capitalism modified by concessions to the rhetoric of the welfare responsibilities of the State (in contradistinction to an undiluted conservatism that rejects societal amelioration even if done to strengthen capitalism itself).

Even that is changing as the American political-economic spectrum shifts ever further rightward so that now it bumps up against the gates of fascism, its motive force the dependence on global hegemony all but eliminating the welfare dimension of a more sophisticated stage of capitalist development. At best, America is emerging from liberalism in its strict terms, exemplified by the New Deal, where a balance was struck between economic concentration (NRA fostered monopolization practically as an index of recovery) and the host of alphabet agencies like WPA and the Farm Security Administration which genuinely served the poor and unemployed, to what I would term liberal fascism, the appearance of the social safety net begrudging as well as demeaning

to ensure the tightening of a hierarchical social system, combined with unrestrained capital accumulation by any means, fair or foul, the militarization of financial and commercial expansion instancing the latter.

What has this to do with cyberwarfare? The more hegemonic, the more America wants more and is running scared that its voracious appetite will not or cannot be satisfied. The nation is viewed by its ruling groups, a fairly unified stratum of economic, political, and military elites, as a captive market to be exploited without mercy, the service sector being a shining example of shoddiness, but extended in every direction as the norm—a condition in which the herd instinct must be operable if the surplus production, financial products, and consumerism in general are to be crammed down people's throats. What better way to cultivate the herd instinct in the populace than to terrorize them, especially at one or two steps removed (in order to keep up the fiction of democracy), by a campaign of massive surveillance! Let's be clear, that the chief practitioner of cyberwarfare is America, and that its chief practice is directed to—or should I say, against?—the American people. NSA is right out of the Nazi playbook, domestic spying to ensure conformity and heighten an awareness of national security as a life-and-death issue facing the country. This is not wartime (as in loose lips sink ships of World War II), but it might as well be, Obama taking over powers not seen before in American history.

In preparation for President Xi's visit in ten days, Obama in preliminary discussions between the US and China has set the tone of belligerence already consistent with his efforts to identify it as America's primary adversary, using the issue of cyberwarfare as a stalking horse for increasing pressure on China to submit to US plans for the economic reorganization of Asia (better known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership) to its consequent disadvantage—if not hoped-for isolation and ultimate dismemberment. Whatever hacking China is responsible for hardly matches America's own domestic record, let alone worldwide operations. Remarkably, we project onto China the actions and motives characterizing our own position, a psychological trait, when one adds self-righteousness, perfectly at home in a framework of liberal fascism. And now Obama, rising on tippy-toes to express his anger, is ready for Xi, as on Ukraine he was ready for Putin. To get a sense of what is going on in the immediate context, I turn to New York Times reporter David Sanger's article, "Cyberthreat Posed by China and Iran Confounds White House, (Sept. 15), an authoritative reading of administration thinking because Sanger is always dependable as NYT's point man for supporting Obama's policies, military, economic, political (of which cyberwarfare involves all three).

Under the heading we see Obama at Fort Meade, home of NSA and the US Cyber Command, speaking to the troops, a photo that speaks volumes about the weaponization of intelligence. Sanger writes, "A question from a member of the Pentagon's new cyberwarfare unit [headed by Admiral Michael Rogers, who also heads the National Security Agency] the other day prompted President Obama to voice his frustration about America's seeming inability to deter a growing wave of computer attacks, and to vow to confront the increasingly aggressive adversaries who are perpetrating them." Frustrating; he'd like nothing better than to go to war with China and Iran (reference to "adversaries" plural) but feels his hands are presently tied, or rather, perhaps under the familiar heading of mission creep, he is working in that direction, or some decisive show of force short of war. His language is guarded yet suggestive: "Offense is moving a lot faster than defense.



The Russians are good. The Chinese are good. The Iranians are good. [The problem is, in tracking down the attacks] we can't necessarily trace it directly to that state [making retaliation hard]."

Suggestive? More like truculent. Still with the troops: "There comes a point at which we consider this a core national security threat. [If China and the others cannot stick within acceptable boundaries], we can choose to make this an area of competition, which I guarantee you we'll win if we have to." Sanger is invaluable, for he gives us evidence and analysis right from the horse's mouth. He states: "If Mr. Obama sounded uncharacteristically [?] combative on the topic, it is because finding a way to deter computer attacks is one of the most urgent and confounding problems he faces in his last 16 months in office." Especially so because Xi's visit "merges with the challenge of containing Iran in the aftermath of the recently completed nuclear agreement with Tehran." As expected China and Iran are perceived (along with Russia) as interrelated threats in Washington, and if Sanger is right, the Iran negotiations were not meant as a step toward peace but even with the accord Iran's further containment. Never mind that the US hacked into its research facilities—we're the good guys, they're the bad guys.

Sanger points out that for the last six weeks, in anticipation of Xi's visit, "mustering the leverage to deter attacks is exactly what Mr. Obama is struggling to accomplish," which has taken the form of officials warning that "they are preparing sanctions against Chinese hackers," and in private meetings linking up "intellectual property theft" with espionage as unacceptable, i.e., if "the theft of 22 million security dossiers from the Office of Personnel Management," an unlikely repository for national-security matters, really compromises national security. (I say this because there have been numerous government prosecutions over alleged theft of intellectual property as though a form of espionage—the phrase "economic espionage" widely current, but in fact having nothing to do with national security and rather business affairs and trade secrets.)

James Clapper, national intelligence director, inadvertently confirms the trivialization of the US criticism of Chinese hacking operations when, at a congressional hearing the day before Obama spoke at Fort Meade, he said "he was far less concerned about a 'large Armageddon strike' that would take out America's power systems than about the kind of smaller but persistent attacks that damaged Sony Pictures Entertainment." The wonders of capitalism, so many bizarre turns to the episode, possibly in retaliation for Sony's film "The Interview," a fictional account of the assassination of Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, in which files stolen were made public and there was no hint of involvement by China—I say wonders of capitalism because hacking a private corporation brought out the FBI in force as though Sony was the equivalent of the US government, America's protective shield thrown around its business system.

An inflexible response treats all matters construed as involving national security (extended to capitalism itself). "With both Iran and China," Sanger writes, "Mr. Obama is struggling with variants of the same problem: How do you contain a rising power that has discovered the benefits of an anonymous, havoc-creating weapon that can also yield vast troves of secret data?" Admiral Rogers: how "convince them actions for which 'they have paid no price'...will no longer be cost-free?" The warning is out there. One writer says America has "a deterrence deficit," implying the need for tougher action, and Sanger views cyberwarfare as inseparable from geopolitical strategy, as US policy makers perceive the issue: "Containing Iran's growing influence in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and throughout the region is central to the administration's post-accord challenge. And containing China's effort to reclaim islands in the South China Sea, a bet by Beijing that neither Washington

nor Asian nations will stop it from developing a new base of operations and exclusive claims to air and sea territory, is the subtext of much of the tension with Mr. Xi's government."

Yet cyberwarfare will be at the top of the agenda, from what I termed a stalking horse to, in reality, a red herring, a means of bloodying US-China relations over deeper issues than that, not reclaiming islands in the South China Sea, but the place of China in the global economy. The US has raised hypocrisy to an art form. Sanger readily admit, though missing its role, America's own reluctance to be bound by international rules on cyberwarfare: In Clapper's testimony he "correct[ed] members of Congress who called the personnel office episode an 'attack,' noting that it was espionage, something the United States does often to the Chinese. And the intelligence agencies do not want any agreements that would limit their own ability to use cyberweapons for covert purposes, as the United States did against Iran in an operation aimed at disabling parts of its nuclear program." It depends on whose ox is gored, opportunism as the high policy pronouncements on the path to possible war.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2015

### **US Middle Eastern Hegemony: Russia and Assad in the Cross-Hairs**

Syria has become America's Vietnam, an arena for testing regional power with eliminating ISIS a pretext for internal regime change (Assad) to satisfy an ally (Israel). Netanyahu is our Diem, and Assad our Ho. Meanwhile the country is torn up, wracked with violence, generating a refugee problem not seen for over half-a-century—a complicated geopolitical setting in which the US is more anti-Assad than anti-ISIS, for reasons never openly explained and leaving ISIS more room to operate. Genuine opposition to ISIS would have enlisted Assad's support. Instead, the guns are turned in his direction. Russia equally opposed to ISIS as America claims to be, is viewed as the Cold War enemy whose support is rejected, lest it assist in the defense of Assad against both ISIS and the US. The friend of our enemy (Syria) is our enemy, whilst the enemy (ISIS) of our enemy remains our enemy, but practically at one step removed. In Washington's policy circles we hear more about Assad than ISIS, as though the entire strategy has been scripted by Israel, which ISIS has curiously left alone.

Very suspicious diplomatic high jinks as meanwhile the trail of human suffering extends through Europe in agonizing flight from a country the victim of international pressures having little to do with the record of the Assad government in relation to its own people. We create the turmoil, and then walk away from its consequences. I have said before that Putin sees through Obama, no free passes because of color, and instead recognition that he has militarized capitalism and intensified confrontation with both Russia and China. Syria, and thus unilateral dominance in the Middle East, is the staging area for mounting a geostrategic offensive with respect to China and Russia as well as safeguarding Israel's interests. Unlike his predecessors, Obama values the former purpose over the latter, Israel less the end-all and be-all of policy in the area, than to be automatically a high priority as America has bigger fish to fry.

Israel is short-sighted, thinking of itself only in regional terms, to which it has been accustomed to wrapping America around its little finger, but the global framework, as the US sees it, is now rapidly changing, the rise of Russia and China to all intents and purposes having equal strength with America creating on its part the necessity for a realpolitik of war, intervention, threats of embargoes

(Xi's coming visit and planned discussions on cyberwarfare, to which the US already hints at embargo-retaliation should the negotiations not go as we want), covert action, and in Syria, regime change, in response to perceived threats. America now is running at full throttle. Israel, a reflex action of pledges of security (Obama will lavish more military hardware on Israel in Netanyahu's coming visit), but attention is directed elsewhere, so that Syria is merely part of an omelet of scrambled eggs with Russia and China the featured adversaries. Assad, Putin, Xi, the two-and-one-half horsemen of the apocalypse, or perhaps better, Assad the stalking horse to get at the other two. What happens in Damascus has repercussions in Moscow and Beijing.

Presently, Russia is in Washington's spotlight for its involvement in the Syrian conflict, thought wholly unwarranted because, by the grace of God, only the US has any right to be in the Middle East. Let's turn to Michael Gordon's New York Times article, "U.S. Begins Military Talks With Russia on Syria," (Sept. 19), for clarification on American thinking with respect to Russia in the region. Gordon writes, "As the first Russian combat aircraft arrived in Syria, the Obama administration reached out to Moscow on Friday [Sept. 18] to try to coordinate actions in the war zone and avoid an accidental escalation of one of the world's most volatile conflicts." This is a "pivot" in policy, now the more diplomatic route, for two weeks earlier Obama had warned Russia it was risking "an escalation of the civil war" in Syria or "an inadvertent confrontation" with the US; last week he "condemned Russia's move as a 'strategy that's doomed to failure.'"

From brandishing the sword, the US, according to Gordon, "seemed to acknowledge [I doubt this very much] that the Kremlin had effectively changed the calculus in Syria in a way that would not be soon reversed despite vigorous American objections. The decision to start talks also reflected a hope that Russia might yet be drawn into a more constructive role in resolving the four-year-old civil war." Translation: Russia's presence is unacceptable, but perhaps the US can involve it in regime change ("constructive role"). To that end, swallowing a little pride, i.e., starting talks, was a small price to pay, however grudging, in pursuit of geopolitical objectives. Accordingly, Ashton Carter, the new Defense Secretary, met with Sergei Shoigu, his Russian counterpart, to discuss the US and Russia's "avoid[ing] running into each other by mistake."

Each side has established a military presence; although Gordon sees the US exclusively focused on ISIS and doing nothing to unseat Assad, at least he admits American intervention: The US has "flown hundreds of air missions in Syria striking the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL." Is regime change far behind, for he continues: "But while Mr. Carter's initial military-to-military talks were limited in scope, officials indicated that the larger goal was to draw the Russians into a political process that would ultimately replace Syria's government of President Bashar al-Assad, a long-time ally of the Kremlin." The last words should be savored, for deposing Assad is an American two-fer: strengthen Israel in the region, weaken Russia (as part of an early skirmish in the Cold War). As for the latter, with power politics perhaps a stand-in for Cold War, Gordon observes that "some former diplomats view the Russian move as a brazen effort to undercut American influence in the region," one example being James Jeffrey, former US ambassador to Iraq and Turkey, who stated: "The whole region is watching this. Russia is trying to change the security dynamic in the Middle East and demonstrating that it supports its allies to the hilt. The White House is sitting there and worrying about de-conflicting airplanes when we should be upping our efforts against Assad."

Not to worry, Amb. Jeffrey, for what is brazen is America's insistence on unqualified regional dominance, a status quo "security dynamic in the Middle East," which looks beyond removing Assad to backing down Russia. In fact, Russia, not the US, invited talks: "Mr. Carter's call to Mr. Shoigu was his first conversation with his Russian counterpart since he took office seven months ago, and it followed Moscow's proposal that the two sides begin military-to-military talks on Syria." The odds of anything productive coming from this, Assad still the stumbling block to any political settlement, are miniscule. Here I move forward a day to Kerry's activity in shaping a united front against both Russia and Syria, in Gordon and Eric Schmitt's Times article, "Russian Buildup in Syria Raises Questions on Role," (Sept. 20), in which they write that, despite Russia's claim that its weaponry there is to fight ISIS, the move "has spurred concerns that Moscow's goal is also to establish a military outpost in the Middle East." Perhaps this is not far-fetched, in that America has done so, with far greater personnel and equipment, for decades.

With an "inadvertent confrontation" between US and Russian aircraft nominally the issue of the two nations' discussion, we see Kerry now in London holding a press conference with the British Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, making clear what America wants in the immediate setting, a complaint "that Moscow was not putting enough pressure" on Assad "to make him negotiate seriously." That is, to step down. The refugee crisis is entirely Assad's fault, Kerry claimed at the news conference: "We need to get to the negotiation. That's what we're looking for, and we hope Russia and Iran, other countries with influence, will help to bring that about, because that's what's preventing this crisis from ending. Right now, Assad has refused to have a serious discussion, and Russia has refused to help bring him to the table in order to do that."

Generously, both Hammond and Kerry will give Assad time to go—but go he must. Kerry: "It doesn't have to be on Day 1 or Month 1. There is a process by which all the parties have to come together and reach an understanding of how this can best be achieved." Hammond: "Assad has to go. He can't be part of Syria's long-term future. But the modality and the timing has to be part of a discussion about a political solution." Regime change, anyone? Talk of intervention! And if a political solution is not forthcoming, can a military one—a la Iraq and Saddam—be far behind? On to Berlin for more talks, now Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Kerry's German counterpart.

My New York Times Comment on the Gordon article, same date, follows:

The US opposition to Assad has never been explained. It cannot be over the matter of supposed atrocities, an issue that has never disturbed US foreign policy in recent years. Why, then, is a defense of this hostility not forthcoming? Is Israel behind the animus?

The comment of one US former official, that Russia is attempting to usurp America's preponderant influence in the Middle East, is instructive. Why should the US take for granted its right to exercise regional dominance? If, in fact, the primary object of policy is the elimination of ISIS, then the better part of wisdom is to enlist Putin in that cause, something he seems willing to consider.

Objectively, the US is less concerned by ISIS than in remaining itself the hegemon in the region. Indeed, that concern appears motivated by the geopolitical strategy of containing and isolating Russia, part of Washington's renewal of Cold War hostilities. The result will be further destabilization of the Middle East, with ISIS slipping between the cracks of America's confrontation with Russia.

It is significant that ISIS has made no move to attack Israel. What gives, in that relationship?

SEPTEMBER 22, 2015

### **GM's Concealment of Crime: Rampaging Corporatism**

For ten years General Motors knew it was killing its customers, borrowing a leaf from Ibsen's "Enemy of the People," in which silence, complicity, and amorality become the basis for cover-up, no longer public baths but the vehicles we drive and the source of great profitability. Such is capitalism, especially its higher registers, mega-corporations too big to fail (as in the \$49B bailout it received in 2009 to avoid bankruptcy). But GM culpability, in what amounts to a slaughter of the innocents, is only part of the story. There is also government, and within government the Department of Justice, specially charged literally over the course of a century with the protection of business, chiefly from unfavorable regulation and also, now with the \$900M fine, a certification that all is well and, the penalty easily absorbed, GM can be restored to good citizenship within industry. The fine, reported Drew Harwell's Washington Post article, "Why General Motor's \$900 million fine for a deadly defect is just a slap on the wrist," (Sept. 18), is "less than a third of its \$2,8 billion in profit last year," and "a fraction" of its "\$156 billion in revenue" for the same period.

We call this the interpenetration of government and business, an arrangement going back to railroad regulation and the Interstate Commerce Commission in the 1880s, but coming into full favor under Theodore Roosevelt and the Bureau of Corporations in constructing detentes with the House of Morgan affecting Morgan's business interests. The situation has not changed, only gotten worse and grown invisible. Gabriel Kolko's pioneering *Triumph of Conservatism and Railroads and Regulation* pin down the relationship, a central element in the stabilization of monopoly capitalism in which the State in providing assistance and protection to the business system has created a political and legal context for capitalist development largely immune from public control or even dissent.

That is where liberalism comes in handy. Simplistically identified with government regulation, one does not ask the intent and consequences of the regulation, its sponsors within Congress and the business/financial community (going back to the Federal Trade Commission legislation and the Federal Reserve Act), i.e., the principal actors to be regulated, who in the first instance draw up the provisions, anticompetitive in character, to ensure the security and growth of the affected firms and banks. Accordingly, administrators have the experience and enjoy a friendly relation with those subject to regulation (the revolving-door principle), an accommodative staff to execute pro-business policies, all within a framework which encases capitalism sealed against popular disapproval and public supervision and control. Ironically, liberalism, here Democrats, more than conservatism, here Republicans and Rightist fringe groups, is more advantageous to capitalism by virtue of activating and relying on the powers of the State. Without government as a partner, the largest banks and firms might encounter decentralizing trends with the rise of new competitors, unsophisticated fiscal and monetary policies, and, what only the State can do, furnish the military power to achieve market penetration and global economic hegemony.

The State is vital to capitalism, especially in its higher stages (although this was also true in its mercantilist phase), not only to construct a shield of protection for business, but increasingly, as now, execute imperialist policies as vital to its sustained growth. In the early 20th century, TR saw

(and praised!) the necessary linkage between capitalism and militarism, in that only via a strong economic base—monopolism—could America have the foundation for entering into world markets and becoming a significant force in international politics. Today that base is fully accepted and taken for granted, allowing policy makers to address the needs of capitalism in its advanced stage—concentration and consolidation—without blinking an eye, while the military component likewise can be pursued for its own sake, interconnections so tight that each seems self-explanatory.

This brings us to GM, an icon of American capitalism (What's good for General Motors is good for the country) that every nerve and fiber of government is pledged to defend. So, the token slap on the wrist, with no federal prosecution of individuals and DOJ's deferred-prosecution agreement with the corporation. If you behave well in future, all is forgiven, your contribution to economic growth and national security deeply appreciated, and in any case corporatism, to which GM mightily advances (I define that here as integrating major business and banking with the structure of power) carries America one step closer to fascism, the synthesis of private and public systems of organization that gave rise, with minor variations, to Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito. Interpenetration is hardly harmless; DOJ and GM consummate a perfect marriage. I turn to Danielle Ivory and Bill Vlasic's article in the New York Times, "\$900 Million Penalty for G.M.'s Deadly Defect Leaves Many Cold," (Sept. 18), for good background on the settlement.

Their account begins, "As the number of deaths linked to defective cars made by General Motors has steadily risen to 124, victims' families have waited for the answer to a burning question: How will federal prosecutors hold the automaker accountable for its decade-long failure to disclose the defect? On Thursday [Sept. 17], they got their answer, and many were disappointed." Well they might be, a 10-year suppression of evidence and in all that time no effort to fix the defect. No employees charged, deferred prosecution for three years. Adding insult to injury (and death) we learn: "If G.M. adheres to the agreement, which includes independent monitoring of its safety practices, the company can have its record wiped clean." Actually the so-called "independent monitoring," noted subsequently, will be conducted by firms having extensive dealings with GM, an outrageous conflict of interest which scarcely raised an eyebrow—and calls into question the sincerity of corporate repentance voiced by Mary Barra, GM's CEO, seen below.

One mother, who lost her daughter: "I don't understand how they can basically buy their way out of it. They knew what they were doing and they kept doing it." This is to be set against the statement of Preet Bharara, US attorney for the Southern District of New York, in his defense of the settlement, an example of the whoredom of government-business relations: "It has been a challenging case, for the agencies, for the prosecutors and for me. We've had to think long and hard about the appropriate resolution in this case." Bharara claimed the prosecutors' principal concern was the victims, and he continued: "I met personally with families who lost loved ones in tragic accidents involving the [defective ignition] switch and, I'll tell you, those were among the most searing moments I've ever spent in my six-plus years as United States attorney." Still, no individual prosecutions, a deferred-prosecution plan, and from there a clean bill of health.

Why the modest settlement (significantly, Toyota had been fined \$1.2B, 25% more, for a less serious crime)? Bharara praised GM for its cooperation in mitigating the penalty. Here the reporters shine, although they refrained from obvious comment of the conflict of interest: "Mr. Bharara cited an internal investigation conducted for G.M. as favorable in determining the penalties paid by the automaker. The two law firms hired for that inquiry, King & King and Jenner & Block, had

previously done legal work for G.M. And court papers show that Anton R. Valukas, the chairman of Jenner & Block, who headed the G.M. investigation, helped represent the automaker in its talks with the Justice Department.” Some corporate lawyers found this arrangement “not unusual because an outside law firm that conducts an investigation knows the facts of a case,” but Deborah Rhode, of Stanford Law School, is quoted as disagreeing: “It would be nice to know that the law firm doing the internal investigation was truly disinterested and didn’t have an interest in subsequent representation [of the same company].” Or as Senator Richard Blumenthal and Edward Markey said in a joint statement: “This outcome fails to require adequate and explicit admission of criminal culpability from G.M. and individual criminal actions. This outcome is extremely disappointing.”

Yes, disappointing, but not unexpected, given the multitude of cover-ups, whether by DOJ, FDA, and virtually all government agencies charged with the legal (and indeed, moral) responsibility of safeguarding the public interest against the crimes practiced by American capitalism against the American people, in this case, “more than a decade of problems with the ignition switch, which is prone to turning off, cutting the engine and disabling systems like power steering and airbags.” As it is, prosecutors looked at only “a relatively short period of time—only about 20 months from the spring of 2012 to February 2014, when G.M. began recalling 2.6 million older cars to fix the switch—even though the first reports of the problem had been made more than a decade earlier.” Finally, Mary Barra, crocodile tears and all, speaking yesterday [Sept. 17] to 1,000 workers in the atrium of GM’s vehicle engineering center: “Let’s pause for a moment and remember that people were hurt and died in our cars. That’s why we are here.”

My New York Times Comment to the Ivory-Vlasic article, same date, follows:

GM is the ISIS of American corporatism. Instead of beheading, it murders through concealment. Not only are there NOT criminal prosecutions of individuals, but also DOJ should be severely chastised for this sweetheart agreement with GM.

Since the end of World War II, American business has been on a rampage of gluttonous behavior—with no restraining arm from the government. This GM case is a textbook one of the interpenetration of business and government, their common front against warranted criticism. Inevitably, this raises the question of the nature of capitalism, its predatory character under the protection of the State.

Will the \$49B bailout or something similar go into the kitty to pay the fine? GM is evil. Period. Barra should be tried for criminal negligence. But we have same old, same old. Deferred prosecution is a sham. UAW no doubt stands firmly behind GM, American labor being equally corrupt as American business, willing to build crematoria if that meant jobs!

How does this treatment of GM differ from other phenomena of the State, from war and intervention, to covert action and regime change? Even Shakespeare would be powerless to capture in words the bottomless well of corruption we see here.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2015

## **Xi and Francis Expose US Nihilism: Rendezvous With Destiny**

The two visits were not planned to coincide, yet they serve as book-ends between which US world policies stand exposed as the militarily dominant but emotionally-spiritually crippled hegemon thrashes about desperately seeking to hold on to its unilateral privileged status. American-sponsored (and defined) globalization no longer carries conviction among the peoples of the world, its very emphasis on the arrogance of power revealing the Leviathan has feet of clay. Of the two, Xi and Francis, it is the latter who poses an immediate, the former a more long-range, threat to American supremacy and smugness.

US certitude of its exceptionalism and greatness, license to act with impunity in international relations and on behalf of concentrated financial-industrial wealth domestically, faces a single voice of humility, but behind that, giving it cogency and power, the yearning of the world's millions for peace on earth, the conservation of the planet, and the raising of living standards worldwide (not the sort of globalization America envisions!). Francis values the ascetic mental cast, which clashes directly with unrestrained capitalism; and whether he is too polite to say it directly on his visit, the anti-capitalist core of his pastoral message to America is loud and clear. His visit to Cuba did not provide a mouthpiece for regime change, much as the American media and US government sought to parse his words to come up with that conclusion. Whatever the differences between socialism and Catholicism in the past, they are being made aware of their commonality of interests by headlong pace of American capitalism to broadcast and expand its essential nihilism to all and sundry, whereby profit and cynicism and the abandonment of all moral obligation rule the roost, a steadily hardening amorality subjecting its own citizens and others to a corporatist framework in which society shall be hierarchically-arranged to suit the needs and ambitions of business.

The world sees this, and from another quarter, China sees this, fueling Xi's confidence that America is incapable any longer of rational planning and discourse, thinking itself invulnerable under its nuclear umbrella. China, meanwhile, lives in the real world of constructing the social organization needed to serve a tremendous population heretofore existing under Third World conditions—patently, the economic miracle of our time. Xi, far more than Mao, is on top of the seemingly inevitable confrontation with America, inevitable because the latter's exceptionalism has made socialism and even democratic working-class rights short of that anathema to the US psychology (read, ideology in petrified form) set on the superiority of capitalism as a closed system of values and practices. The US is not used to being talked back to, much less a counter-example and alternative modal pattern of development, which together demonstrate America's basic thrust of wealth inequality, ethnic and racial tensions, and an internal regimen of massive surveillance, all indicative of a structural-cultural path toward fascism.

Neither Xi nor Francis has to be explicit on this direction, the US is doing that for them; but only the politically-morally blind ignore the living refutation each represents to the American social order. Let's start with Francis, who, in his first social encyclical, *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home*, (June 18), presents anti-capitalism not in Marxian prose and analysis, but in homiletic terms which nonetheless carry the same punch. He fuses concern over climate change with an indictment of poverty, granted, an indirect castigation of capitalism, yet as one looks closer, an additive process of moral scorn which relates the degradation of humanity and the environment to a common source, the deification of wealth and privilege. In his remarks at the White House



ceremony today marking his visit (Sept. 23), preceded by Obama's insipidity claiming their agreement on basic issues, Francis does not tip his hand on the other's hypocrisy concerning treatment of the poor or climate change—as though both were walking on egg shells—but the record speaks loud and clear.

Let's start with *Laudato Si*, and let the reader imagine Obama saying, believing, and acting upon the same statements. This first batch derives from June 18, and from there I'll add more recent statements:

"We have to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

"Whatever is fragile like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market."

"An integral ecology includes taking time to reflect on our lifestyle and our ideals."

More recently, Francis said on July 2, "A great challenge: stop ruining the garden which God has entrusted to us so that we may enjoy it." On July 15: "Now is the time for a change in mindset and to stop pretending that our actions do not affect those who suffer from hunger." And on August 25: "A Christian who is attached to riches has lost his way." This is similar to the Social Gospel and/or Christian Socialism in late 19th century America, albeit, non-revolutionary, eschewing mounting the barricades, yet far to the Left of current American beliefs and growing directly out of Francis's experience with fascist dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s.

He knows what he is about, and in his references to "a deified market," "an integral ecology," and the "garden" facing spoliation, capitalism leaps out before us as the prime candidate for man's inhumanity to man. Even in his visit to Cuba, the fact that he did not condemn Fidel and Raul must have proven disappointing to the Administration. Xi, on the other hand, is more assertive, for he is prepared to go head-to-head with Obama, who appears psychologically invested in the weakening and isolation of China. Obama readily demonized Putin; Xi appears to be a more elusive target, whose readiness to deal with American business does not fit the stereotype of a Communist devil. Xi arrived in Seattle the same day Francis arrived in Washington, and it would be instructive if both could have a frank discussion in New York about US global hegemony and its consequences for war, intervention, and world poverty, but I fear that will not happen.

We can see an adversarial edge to Xi's visit, from Obama's standpoint, from Jane Perlez's New York Times article, "Xi Jinping Pledges to Work With U.S. to Stop Cybercrimes," (Sept. 23), in which Xi repudiates US charges and calls for greater cybersecurity. He politely refrains from mentioning the US record on surveillance and eavesdropping, as well as attempts to wreak havoc upon Iran's nuclear research. Instead, addressing American business executives, he said: "The Chinese government will not in whatever form engage in commercial theft, and hacking against government networks are crimes that must be punished in accordance with the law and relevant international treaties." He added, "China is ready to set up a high-level joint dialogue mechanism with the United States on fighting cybercrimes." An Obama senior China adviser promised "very robust discussion."

Xi expressed confidence in China's economy, the recent stock market decline being "only a problem in the course of progress," to which his government was taking corrective steps to avoid

“systemic risk.” Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, and Bill Gates, its founder, sat on either side of Xi’s senior adviser, Li Zhanshu, symbolizing what I believe to be Xi’s strategy of bypassing Washington as hopelessly ideological and connecting up directly with the business leadership. “We are ready,” Xi stated, “to discuss rule-of-law issues with the U.S. side in a spirit of mutual learning for common progress.” Penny Pritzker, Commerce Secretary, preceded him, warning that he should not expect “his meetings in Washington would be smooth going.” She spoke of “the lack of a level playing field across a range of sectors.” What she did not say, of course, is that Obama’s pivot, both his Pacific-first strategy of military containment and his Trans-Pacific Partnership of economic isolation, had put China on notice of America’s geopolitical framework of making China the new focus of a revitalized Cold War.

Whether “Communist” any longer characterizes China’s political economy and social order may be subject to debate, there and elsewhere, but America’s official response goes beyond mistrust to the need to assail an Enemy threatening US global pre-eminence. Ironically, the central issue for America may no longer be capitalism per se, but that which has historically been associated with it: the power to act with impunity in international relations, specifically, market penetration and financial dominance for purely hegemonic as well as capitalist reasons, as though the militarization of America’s world presence would insure against competition or displacement—a fear both Francis and Xi recognize as the US’s motivating force.

My New York Times Comment on the Perlez article, same date, follows:

Sec. Pritzker’s reference to a level playing field translates as a return to the Open Door policies of the late 19th century, when China was weak and could not counter US terms of market penetration. No longer can China be taken for granted as the arena for one-sided business arrangements.

Compared with Obama, Xi is a real mensch—no whining, no ballyhoo, and instead the straightforward analysis of problems. In time, China may well overtake America in economic power. Xi’s anti-corruption campaign has no parallel in the US, as witness the slap on the wrist for GM and its premeditated murder of upwards now of 200 with the defective ignition switch.

Consider the problems facing China and how it is attempting to provide for its huge population via urban resettlement. And consider Obama’s Pacific-first strategy, with carrier battle-groups adjacent to China—a clear act of HOSTILITY, along with the Trans-Pacific Partnership to isolate China, which should make Xi less accommodating to Obama than he is.

We see the paradox where business in America seeks greater reconciliation with China than does government, USG solidly entrenched in Cold War thinking that shows ideology (rigidly maintained) trumps both peace and pragmatism. The administration does not want improvement in relations. It has a vested interest in hate and backwardness. Xi is above such infantilism, and perhaps also are the two business communities.

SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

## **Francis's Anti-Capitalism? An Organic Moral Order**

Pope Francis in his whirlwind tour subtly criticized America in deeper ways than any present US political figure. Instinctively, the people responded, perhaps to his office, to his charisma, but I'd like to think—without comprehending that subtlety—to his vision of commonwealth. The word does not appear in his homilies, yet it describes an organicism in his thought which moves the social order into a moral order through successive steps in the affirmation of humanity's cosmic and spiritual identity. One NYT columnist called him a 19<sup>th</sup> century pope whose ideas have not come up to modern times. That is superficial, based on Francis's not going down the line in the culture wars (presumably, the emancipation of women, even though he was quite clear on that score).

Francis's genius lies in crafting a modern and thoroughly progressive sensibility onto an essentially medieval social-structural-ideational framework. He is not anti-capitalist so much as he is pre-capitalist, which actually comes to the same thing because not embracing, indeed rejecting, that which defines modern capitalism. I like what I heard, for this may be the only way to crack open the impenetrable political-economic-ideological wall in which capitalism surrounds itself. When, for example, he spoke of globalization, he infused it with such meaning, an equality of rights affecting every individual, as to question hegemony, imperialism, world poverty, and war as singly and together (for they are integrated phenomena) destructive of the integrity of the individual, his/her moral and spiritual existence, and Nature per se. Man inhabits Nature, part of the organicism I noted.

Francis begins with the sacredness of the individual (I might add, in the sight of God, but as an integral political theory, spiritual need not be code for belief in God, but rather, as in Kant's categorical imperative, a higher moral standard as such, one which might be secular without disturbing the fundamental obligation of observance), and from there, places the individual into the family, making the latter endowed with the same moral attributes. The family then becomes a microcosm of the social order. That is extremely important. One treats others as one treats members of one's own family. The social order becomes the Family of Man. Already you have departed miles away from capitalism, which favors inequality, domination, alienation inscribed in the very structure of the political economy and value system.

God may be an inspiring thought, a pathway leading to Augustine's City of God, or to myriad Christian utopianists, especially 17<sup>th</sup> century mystical poets, but the predication of human solidarity and fulfillment would as easily describe Eugene Debs and countless socialists in America. What I find distinctive and emotionally heartening in Francis is the inclusiveness of his vision; for Man, Family, Nature are inseparable. They define a social order which through faithfulness to the golden rule (which was a loud applause line for him) transmutes itself into a moral order as well. The golden rule may be a cliché, but when Francis goes further, seeing the desecration of Nature (for him, Mother Nature) as intimately related to the widespread existence of poverty, both being injustices and violations of the moral order, one begins to appreciate the firmness of his critique of capitalism, the materialization of human identity and striving which, like Marx's warning, reduces the human into an object, and whether rich or poor, an object obliterating the moral essence of Man and Nature alike.

Francis provides us the scaffolding to construct a moral life, for the person, the society, and, without ascribing anthropomorphic qualities to it, nature itself. For nature, capitalized or not, defines its own self-respecting universe, not to be the object of spoliation, rape, or the promiscuous pursuit of profit. Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, shows a reverence for nature and the need for an attitude of human succoring and compassion toward it that confirms his not simply environmental progressiveness but more important his biting, even ferocious critique of the waste and plunder attending capitalism, waste and plunder readily leading to war and aggression. If there is a single term he said repeatedly, it is peace, peace as infusing the whole chain of existence, harmonizing aspirations for a better life, as a global concern and to be rendered practicable, with the construction of a livable social order, which by virtue of fulfilling that endeavor, becomes the sought-for moral order, social and moral fused as coterminous and indivisible.

With this in mind, we understand more fully Francis's opposition to climate change: climate change = desecration of nature = desecration of humankind and its moral potentialities. How man treats the environment is crucial, beyond an awakened moral sense, to one's reverence for life—yes, the abortion issue, for Francis and the Church, but also, for Francis, and here I would agree, life as the whole organic universe, including its institutions, a reverence then for all that dwells within it, a further expansion of the chain of existence. This is not rocket science, but simply an encompassing doctrine of love, kindness, humility. Francis does not hide his contempt for the powerful, who disrupt the moral order by their quest for and conservation of privilege, wealth, and power. Intuitively, this is what the crowd sensed in his visit, a brief magical interlude in the return to business as usual (taken literally).

In the wake of his impendent departure, the New York Times had an editorial, "The Soaring Price of Political Access," (Sept. 27), which was probably not influenced by his presence yet has, by emphasizing the corrupting uses of money, a flavor of the zeitgeist to which, temporarily, we owe Francis a debt of gratitude—for The Times a good critical analysis of current practice. It begins, "Politicians busy soliciting ever-larger donations from eager millionaires epitomize the truth of a 12-year-old Supreme Court ruling on contribution limits: 'Money, like water, will always find an outlet.'" The editorial implicates both major parties, pointing out that they are "planning tenfold increases in the rates V.I.P. donors will be charged to secure the right to attend exclusive dinners," etc., which brings them into contact with "candidates and party leaders." With Citizens United and super PACS, "the richest donors are buying ever more influence over politicians, with favoritism and corruption an inevitable result." Democrats are matching Republicans stride by stride, even asking "the Federal Election Commission this month to approve dubious shortcuts around the law that Republican candidates already have been taking."

The foregoing is obvious, but by coincidence I belatedly just read Glenn Greenwald's "With Liberty and Justice for Some," in which he traces a two-tiered legal system, with the granting of retroactive immunity to the telecom companies, engaged in felonious conduct by implementing the National Security Agency's massive surveillance program on the American people, as a clear example of the power of money, the contemptuous treatment of the rule of law, and, in effect, the double standard under which capitalism operates—all of which I find implicit or explicit in Francis's indictment of the current order. Organicism can have its retrograde structural-social applications, but not, I think, in his hands. For in his hands, a genuine equalitarianism emerges

throughout the whole chain of existence: if I may, a globalization of virtue, in which degradation of any sort finds no lodgment.

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

Money vitiates the democratic process. Its growing emphasis has already proven the corrupted nature of the Court and Congress because neither is dedicated to the Founders' principles of free elections based on reason and justice. Yes, we are a plutocracy; justice is for sale to the highest bidder. Lobbyists have replaced the people's representatives as the determiners of policy and values.

The entire process in which money defines public outcomes directly negates the rule of law. Money buys impunity. Only this week GM is fined for a defective ignition switch responsible for killing large numbers of people, but no criminal prosecution and the promise of a clean bill of health. Every major player, from political parties to mega-corporations, appears to be pushing to the limits its legitimated impunity; laws and safeguards are falling right and left. What remains?

Selfishness, greed, opportunism, lies, deceptions, the assault on truth—paradoxical in that becoming glaringly obvious in the midst of Pope Francis's visit to America. Public morality has been twisted so out of shape that we do not even recognize how money seriously compromises democracy. To him who has shall have the fruits of others. Both major parties are complicit in robbing the people of a decent life. Both major parties are in a bidding war to see which one can be the more effective servant of power. America's moral core has been so eroded that one wonders if it can ever be restored.

OCTOBER 1, 2015

### **“Diplomacy” as Cover for Aggression: Obama’s UN Speech**

Words can be playthings for war criminals, as is the case here. Michael Hudson and Paul Craig Roberts provided excellent context for Obama's UN appearance (CounterPunch, Sept. 29); my own follow-up textually analyzes the lies and contradictions behind Obama's splendiferous rhetoric, a display of hypocrisy and cant worthy of Woodrow Wilson in transmogrifying the meaning of democracy—as now, does Obama—to fit an hegemonic foreign policy dedicated to counterrevolutionary ends. In both cases, Russia is the central object of attention, Obama the Wilsonian of US exceptionalism brought up to date, post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan, interventions and multiple covert actions, attempts at regime change, and drone assassination, as well as embargoes, boastfulness of military and economic might, in sum, the exultation and use of force characterizing America's role in international politics. The speech reeks with premises of a double standard exempting the US from the rule of law.

This is disheartening, but not unexpected, the Bush-Obama continuity in national-security policy, part of the larger pattern from the World War II aftermath forward, reaching an apogee of Reaction, that is, until the next stage of political-ideological consolidation of nascent fascism becomes evident. America has been the leading force in global conflict and disruption, the two areas Obama singles out for special comment in the speech, Ukraine and Syria, both showing its unilateral drive for unrestricted dominance. On the former, a coup in Kiev installed through US effort a Far Right hooliganism disguised as government, and as for the latter, one queries, what gave America the right to consider the Middle East an exclusive zone of control and military penetration? This last has been going on for some time, and interestingly, in all the discussion, planning, and concrete activity to displace Assad, there is no mention of Israel's possible role in guiding or supporting US policy in this regard—nor, of course, giving reasons for demonizing him.

If Assad has gone against his people, evidence of atrocities has thus far been sketchy, and the tenor of the discussion smells like old fish given America's penchant for strengthening and on occasion installing dictatorial regimes—for what else defines the CIA's purpose in being?

Let's look, then, at the speech, the caveat being: words are measured by the record presumably supporting them. In self-congratulatory mode, Obama credits the US since the UN's founding with "prevent[ing] a third world war—by forging alliances with old adversaries; by supporting the steady emergence of strong democracies accountable to their people instead of a foreign power; and by building an international system that imposes a cost on those who choose conflict over cooperation, an order that recognizes the dignity and equal worth of all people." As though there had never been a Cold War with the US immune from criticism, beginning with Bretton Woods, then the Marshall Plan, the support of Chiang, Korea, atomic diplomacy, the poisonous cultural atmosphere of McCarthyism—and we've barely gotten out of the early 1950s. Each of his boasts is qualified by history, the last, "an order that recognizes the dignity and equal worth of all people," not even applying to the US itself, where massive surveillance hardly bespeaks respect for the people—nor the saturation bombing, whether in Vietnam or Iraq. And who but America, "choose[s] conflict over cooperation"?

There have been setbacks, to be sure, "but we [he refers to the UN, yet implicitly puts America at the forefront] have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms that are better and stronger and more consistent." In fact, quite the opposite, the US in flagrant violation thereof in shaping international alliance systems and practicing regime change, in the Hemisphere, for starters, but extending worldwide wherever governments give signs of disobedience or ingratitude. America, like Wilson also proclaimed, is the foundation of world order—internationalism then, globalization now. Yet, Obama warns, beware: "the march of human progress never travels in a straight line, that our work is far from complete; that dangerous currents risk pulling us back into a darker, more disordered world." The reference, unmistakably, is first to Russia, the center of Obama's animus, and also, never far behind, China.

Syria becomes the test of America's beneficence in international politics. The US must never forsake its moral obligation to advance democracy. "Today," he states, "we see the collapse of strongmen and fragile states breeding conflict, and driving innocent men, women and children across borders on an epic scale. Brutal networks of terror have stepped into the vacuum." In other words, Assad is to blame for ISIS and the refugee problem, America's pressures toward regime change in Syria nonexistent. However, Russia and China are not far behind as culprits in defaming (American-sponsored) world order. Older ground rules, e.g., "might makes right" and "strong states must impose their will on weaker ones," are no longer acceptable: "On this basis, we see some major powers assert themselves in ways that contravene international law. We see an erosion of the democratic principles and human rights that are fundamental to this institution's [UN's] mission.... In accordance with this logic, we should support tyrants like Bashar al-Assad, who drops barrel bombs to massacre innocent children, because the alternative is surely worse." Actually, despite the straight-line projection from Russia to Assad to bombing innocent children, one senses that Obama is more anti-Assad than anti-ISIS and acts accordingly.

Granted, the world sees "greater polarization," to which America "is not immune," but under his leadership Obama charts the path forward (a pardonable braggadocio given what he has to offer): "As President of the United States, I am mindful of the dangers that we face; they cross my desk

every morning. I lead the strongest military that the world has ever known, and I will never hesitate to protect my country or our allies, unilaterally and by force where necessary.” An open admission of US impunity in the violation of international law! To which he adds, “We cannot look backwards,” precisely the phrase he used to explain away his refusal to investigate the Bush administration for possible war crimes—we must go forward, not backwards (he uses it whenever his administration has been caught red-handed in its arrogance of power).

From here we enter Obama’s topsy-turvy world in which he proclaims America’s abidance with international law, renunciation of repression, and commitment to the role and power of ideas. Examples: “Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed.” “I believe in my core that repression cannot forge the social cohesion for nations to succeed.” “You can jail your opponents, but you can’t imprison ideas. You can try to control access to information, but you cannot turn a lie into truth.” All noble words, but contradicted at every turn by his and USG’s actions, as when he said above, “unilaterally and by force where necessary.” There is much more to the speech, layers on layers of hypocritical gibberish, but let me stop here with this extended nugget, a renunciation of imperialism, repression, aggression: “Indeed, I believe that in today’s world, the measure of strength is no longer defined by the control of territory. Lasting prosperity does not come solely from the ability to access and extract raw materials.”

He continues: “The strength of nations depends on the success of their people—their knowledge, their innovation, their imagination, their creativity, their drive, their opportunity—and that, in turn, depends upon individual rights and good governance and personal security.” High school spread-eagle oratory at its best—never mind surveillance, mass incarceration, the militarization of state and local police, pressures exerted on the media for abject conformity, a tightening of political discourse, far worse than under McCarthyism, because now internalized by the citizenry, with ethnocentric, xenophobic beliefs and values receiving widespread assent in the political arena, and the self-righteous praise of Exceptionalism conferring license to act as though inhabiting a solipsistic world of grace as launching pad for global pillaging. He concludes the passage: “Internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure to provide this foundation.” Yes, and America has excelled in both.

My New York Times Comment to one of several article on the topic, (Sept. 28), follows:

Obama criticizes Putin, ignoring his own role and that of the US in global interventions, covert actions, and regime change. America does not have clean hands; Obama especially, with his massive surveillance at home, should be the last to criticize either Putin or Assad—his own record of confrontation with Russia and China, his boast that America has the strongest military, his militarization of trade (TPP), his general demeanor, mark him as the most belligerent, officious president in modern memory.

Putin and Xi have a firm grasp of international politics, while Obama is the cowboy/braggart thoroughly at home with the use of force, not to say, drone assassination. To hear him criticize the others is sheer phoniness, as he brings America lower in the world’s estimation.

OCTOBER 6, 2015

## **Cold War Rhetoric: The Kept Intelligentsia**

The American propaganda machine is working overtime. Used to a supine, quiescent Russia in international politics, convinced that sanctions and lower world oil prices are successful silent mechanisms to that end, Putin's dramatic move in the Middle East has more than ruffled American feathers, and rather, as though seemingly confirmatory signs of Russian aggression, gives the United States the opportunity it wants and has long sought: to heighten Cold War tensions and feelings as cover for its own regularization of unilateral global dominance. Syria is not about Assad, nor about ISIS, in US policy assumptions. This is 1947 all over again, Russia qua Soviet Union and Stalin, to be contained, ultimately, crushed and dismembered. Only now, Putin is seen as more than Stalin II, and rather, a formidable, intelligent adversary who must be demonized and mentally/ideologically reduced in importance, if not obliterated on sight.

To keep America strong, we invent our own devils. The most insidious word in the American lexicon is "peace," going back to Theodore Roosevelt and the Battleship Navy, code for softness, flabbiness, easily conquered in, even then, a geopolitical paradigm of inevitable conflict in which America must win and remain on top or decline and simply go under. More than one hundred years later, nothing has appreciably changed, the mental-set fully intact, and with the Bolshevik Revolution a ready perennial target always there and in the making by which to justify a vision of unrestrained slash-and-burn US capitalism.

World War II, FDR, and the fight against fascism, was the splendid exception to the unrelenting war on socialism, and even in the midst of war the preplanned return to business as usual once the Axis Powers were vanquished. Containment was the operative principle, no bones about it, except that its dimensions were wider than in George Kennan's original concept, emerging as a counterrevolutionary global design to embrace Third World retardation under free trade rather than colonial principles. The world was to be ours, an oyster pried open through armaments and implemented schemes of regime change. Historical continuity is an embarrassment, but there it is: a long trail of interventions, actual and proxy wars, puppet governments, internal subversion, covert operations, carrot-and-stick propositions to surrender to American terms, all viewed as necessary, fully justifiable moves in fulfilling the rights and expectations of American Exceptionalism.

Mao, Fidel and Che, Ho, but also Mossadegh, Chavez, any and all who challenged the American Imperium, were to be confronted, pressured, delegitimized, steamrolled over where and when possible or convenient, while maintaining the veneer of democracy and international good citizenship. Putin may be the first world leader in decades to say the Emperor has no clothes, or rather, wears a suit of armor starting to squeak and requiring a fresh supply of oil (literally). No question, he is a different kettle of fish, not the tactful Xi Jinping, and in the hands of the three recent presidents, Clinton, Bush, Obama, a ready-made target for demonization precisely because neither fearful of American hegemony nor obsequious to US claimed moral superiority.

Weakness bespeaks denunciation of the Other, the shadow world of feigned arrogance when in reality one's own society is overflowing with hatred: hatred of the stranger, the immigrant, the dissenter, the poor, in the last analysis, ourselves, because rampant American capitalism leaves in its wake dissatisfaction with life, fear of stumbling, desirous of a potency that only militarism can satisfy. Putin should be greeted as an iconic Freud, for liberating our collective neuroses bordering



on psychoses, bringing us up short to our true selves, and instead, as expected when layers of suppressed feeling are in danger of being revealed, the psychological door is snapped shut and the bilious matter remains on the surface to fester and require more self-concealment and more armaments, more assurances of rectitude, still greater vilification of the Other, in this case, Putin, as the convenient symbol of the Enemies surrounding blameless, pristine America.

For liberals (a term of derision for me, signifying antiradical cosmetic moderation of capitalism, on the same continuum with Rightist organization and thought in America) we see a polite form of condemnation of Putin frequently dressed in proper academic language, not the guttural-like verbiage of Republicans and segments of the media, yet with the same desire to blame, wound, destroy. I just picked up Walter Laqueur's recent book, *Putinism: Russia and Its Future with the West* (2015), which possesses the requisite scholarly tone that makes a hatchet-job respectable and comports with the style, tone, and purposes of his affiliations, e.g., the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, intended therefore as a damning indictment of the putative adversary no quarter given. Moderates, whether Laqueur or the *New York Times*, are more ideologically decisive and destructive, because of their seeming moderation and proper language, than the presumed unsophisticated vulgarians that make up the Republican party and especially their current candidates. Words are deceiving; content should be everything, and the free pass given liberals enables them to hide a more cosmopolitan proto-fascism, as I believe describes, particularly in foreign policy (most germane here), many Democrats as well.

For Laqueur, Putin is less a Stalinist than a Czarist, wanting to go back to a nineteenth-century re-creation of an ordered Russia, a mighty fortress, free from internal social disturbance, and respectful of a Strong State. And Putin, the account goes, is cynical, manipulative, having as his goal great-power status in the modern world. (As though it doesn't already enjoy that status—the author regarding it as sinful that Russia should have this aspiration or seek to confirm its reality.) America the global demigod is a given of liberal orthodoxy. What this account says about Russia is that Marxism-Leninism was always a front for premodern political-economic development underpinned by devotion to the Russian Orthodox Church, a monolithic societal formation held together, first to last, by repression, Putin merely the last tyrant standing and capitalizing on centuries-old anti-Western feeling which has turned Russia eastward, looking to Asia as its natural sphere of predominance. To elaborate on Laqueur's subtitle, *Russia and Its Future with the West*, it has none, only the role of spoiler and disrupter.

Here in microcosm we see the spirit of liberal interpretation, my sense of the kept intelligentsia, in the *New York Times* article by Steven Myers, "In Putin's Syria Intervention, Fear of a Weak Government Hand," (Oct. 4), in which the purist state-dimension explains all, Putin's motivation and Russian behavior, autocracy and totalitarianism joined. Impossible, then, for either to play a constructive role in Syria and the Middle East or against ISIS. Myers begins with Putin in 1989 "watch[ing] with alarm as thousands of East Germans in Dresden swarmed the riverside compound of the dreaded secret police, the Stasi." East German Communism collapsing, he "could only stand by helplessly at the K.G.B.'s Dresden outpost a few hundred feet away." He, according to Myers, viewed the crowd—although the takeover "was relatively peaceful"—as "frenzied, deranged and dangerous, and the experience that night haunted him like nothing else in his mostly undistinguished career as an intelligence officer."

The upshot? In 1991 when the Soviet Union fell from what Putin called “a paralysis of power,” and became Russia, “That diagnosis has been a driving force in his consolidation of political power, and it does much to explain Russia’s forceful intervention last week to bolster the besieged government of Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad.” Putin’s hatred of disorder explains his own and Russia’s position in the world, an a priori reflex action in light of his own experience justifying intervention and the worship of power. Never mind the facts on the ground, defense of a long-standing ally against determined American opposition (never fully explained) and CIA-trained groups aiming at regime change, as well as Russia’s stake in combating ISIS having faced Chechnya Islamic terrorist activities. (Russia’s call for a cooperative effort to destroy ISIS, using Assad’s forces in the coalition, has gone unanswered.) Thus Myers concludes the thought, “The specter of mass protest—of mob rule—is one that has haunted Mr. Putin throughout his political life, and that fear lies at the heart of his belief in the primacy of state authority above all else, both at home and abroad.”

Mob rule, not American universal hegemony, exhibited through military encirclement of Russia, defines Putin’s order of priorities and presumed consequent authoritarian state-building and aggressive foreign-policy conduct. For Myers, Putin saw opposition to Assad as the “unlawful usurpation of government authority... [which] leads inexorably not to positive political change, but rather to chaos.” The portrayal is complete: an unsure leader mortified by disorder, hence, devoted to the status quo as a first principle. Perhaps thinking this was proof of his assertion, Myers quotes Putin at the UN last week in what I take to be the opposite: “Of course, political and social problems have been piling up for a long time in this region, and people wanted change. But what was the actual outcome?” The outcome, as he sees it, is severalfold: first, the creation of a vacuum because of US attempts to dislodge Assad, in which ISIS has gained a foothold; second, American intervention, as in the plan to overthrow Assad, is about exclusive predominance in the Middle East, no other power, namely, Russia, having any legitimate role to play or interest in the region; and finally, I only surmise, Assad’s overthrow is intended, beyond keeping Russia out as part of the larger geopolitical framework, to stabilize alignments which undermine Iran and protect Israel, making the latter America’s surrogate in the region looking after its interests.

Fear of disorder/chaos, the psychological linchpin determining Putin’s conduct, domestic and foreign, and furnishing the rationale for a strong (absolutist?) state. Myers: “This distrust of popular will has been the justification for laws that have throttled dissent at home. With each election, the Kremlin has tightened the rules governing political parties and public gatherings.” Again: “What is striking, though perhaps consistent, is how Mr. Putin’s view of public protest has become the basis for an increasingly assertive foreign policy, one aimed at countering what he views as efforts by the United States and others to violate the sovereignty of nations by encouraging political change.” Let’s not be squeamish—regime change, and hardly a chimera. Here’s where one puts the petal to the metal, for Myers, along with most Western observers, treats Russia’s suspicions of US involvement in the so-called “color revolutions” as irrational and self-serving, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, 2002-2005, while I submit America was up to its neck in their planning and execution.

No less a foreign-policy figure than Anthony Cordesman of (where else) the Center for Strategic and International Studies recognizes Russian thinking that regime change is a surrogate for war when he writes (Oct. 2) that these presumed “popular uprisings have been studied by Russia’s military commanders as ‘a new U.S. and European approach to warfare that focuses on creating

destabilizing revolutions in other states as a means of serving their security interests at a low cost and with minimal casualties.” Neither he nor Myers denies the accuracy of the assertion, and one suspects their favorable view of the outcome. Yet Myers sarcastically adds, as though the Russians are all wet in the face of selfless American conduct: “The civil war in Syria, in that view, is merely the latest in a series of messy conflicts that arise from the toppling or weakening of central authority through American aggression. Previous instances include the American war in Iraq that overthrew Saddam Hussein, and NATO’s military intervention in Libya in 2011.” Not messy, and therefore dismissible, but aggression, first and last. And then we have Ukraine, for which Russia is blamed as the usurper subjugating a freedom-loving people.

Myers summarizes that Putin’s desire to create a diversion from failures at home and other factors may be involved, “but at the heart of the airstrikes is Mr. Putin’s defense of the principle that the state is all powerful and should be defended against the hordes, especially those encouraged from abroad. It is a warning about Russia, as much as Syria.” The hint is planted, to the Russian people, watch your step, keep order, or you too can be the subject of airstrikes. ISIS is practically forgotten (we’re not even sure which hordes he has in mind) as the dynamics of regime change grinds on, Myers being merely illustrative of predominant American thinking. My New York Times Comment on the Myers article, Oct. 5, follows:

“...especially encouraged from abroad.” This one-sided view of Putin ignores a central tenet of US policy: regime change. Putin’s critique of Western policy does not occur in a vacuum. We have abetted and engineered the rise of dictators for so long; merely go back to the Shah and Pinochet.

And to demonize Putin, as The Times continually does, making a mockery of its claims to objectivity and integrity, does not weigh in the analytical balance the massive NSA surveillance of the American people. Are we a model democracy? Our president relishes, yes, relishes, the continuation of drone assassination and covert action. Is the CIA any more virtuous than the KGB? Is the US military budget somehow more exonerative than that of Russia’s?

Why the unfairness in discussing world politics? Why, using Ukraine, is there no mention of the American-sponsored coup d’etat?

Conceivably, Putin favors state power because he knows, as does much of the world, that US intervention to overthrow governments it does not favor, destroys the international playing field.

OCTOBER 8, 2015

### **Heart of Darkness: A Two-Way Street**

Violence begets violence, slaughter begets slaughter. Kunduz and Roseburg are dialectically intertwined. Patients burned to death in the ICU. Hospital’s coordinates sent in advance. AC-130 gunship hovering overhead. A mistake. No, deliberate murder. Scene change—Oregon: premeditated mass murder, English class, multiple weapons, obsession with guns. General John F.

Campbell and Christopher Harper-Mercer are interchangeable, except that one has multiple rows of ribbons, themselves testimony to, and dedicated to, killing human beings.

Kunduz/Umpqua, names, locations, number of deaths, it doesn't matter, an unrelieved landscape of violence speaking to the cancer poisoning the American mindset. There is nothing new here. Vietnam was a thousand Kunduzs, Roseburg a like number of US atrocities, self-inflicted rather than coming from the top. Gunships hover, ready to blast; drones hover, ready to assassinate. The technology to inflict harm and destruction is not causative. People stand behind it, develop it, are responsible for it. Obama had his hand on the weaponry unleashed on the MSF hospital, a war criminal shielded by high office. The American public has its hand on the weapons every time a schoolchild is gunned down, itself shielded by custom, usage, the Constitution.

Each theater of war encourages the other. For every murder committed in the United States the bar is lowered, permission silently granted, for doing the same abroad. The flow is reciprocal. My Lai fosters Newtown. And still the slaughter continues, nothing to impede its progress. Self-hatred is a unitary phenomenon, in this case a license for genocide, micro- or macro- in scale, rooted in the fusion of Capitalism, Exceptionalism, and the hierarchical/class structuring of social relations. The superior don't wince at their cruelty to others, and as with the Mercers of this world they kill by designated authority, that of the zeitgeist to which we are all habituated, while the Campbells of this world gloat in satisfaction over the higher level of delegated authority they wield.

Hierarchy (aka capitalism in its scaffolding and formal structure) is the self-acknowledged context for an operant ruling group, an alignment of political and economic elite leadership buttressed by the foot soldiers under its command, a mass populace ideologically rootless, apathetic, panting for crumbs from the table of privilege. We follow orders, as meanwhile we are being fleeced, flim-flammed, taken for granted. In addition to being a war criminal, Obama is a kept man, if not doing the exact bidding of industrial-financial upper groups, then acting within the narrow structural-ideological parameters the overall system created by wealth allows. He gives orders, but he is the servant of power—just, of course, as General John F. Campbell, with his decks of ribbons to show for it, is, and just as the political whores in Congress, the media, and the think tanks, are.

Right now, America is operating on several fronts of engagement—all harmful to the realization of human dignity. In that light, Kunduz must be whitewashed, instead of recognized for what it is, a deliberate assertion of power, knowingly criminal, to warn the world not to cross our bow, lest we be taken for what in fact we are, a declining Empire. Decline carries with it a sense of urgency: will the geopolitical dike hold? If not, blow it and ourselves to smithereens along with all others. The US in Syria is a product of the Kunduz-Roseburg mentalset, itself a product of centuries of ethnocentric arrogance as perfect disguise for the way America treats its poor, its minorities, its dissenters. The rallying cry is, Push forward, mouth the platitudes of freedom and democracy (while squeezing all meaning from them!), so that both Roseburg and Kunduz can become distant objects in the rear-view mirror of American history.

That is imperative, never stop moving, for otherwise we must halt to address as a nation who and what we actually are—militarized, as a way of life (intimately geared to the retention of hierarchy), expansionist, to satisfy the thirst of our capitalist enterprises and institutions, and for good measure, embodying ultra-patriotism to hide the self-destructive defects of national character. Guns are the pens with which we write out our fantasies of moral greatness and individual self-worth, the former,

Kunduz, the latter, Roseburg. But why stop there? There are whole worlds to conquer to prove our sterling worth. Russia and China lie just over the horizon, testing grounds of character and courage—and the American brand of capitalism. The US must succeed in its endeavors; the alternative is pervasive darkness, the darkness that already envelops the American soul.

OCTOBER 12, 2015

### **The “Apologies”: A Note On Usage**

Obama intentionally deceives the American public, the politicization of a term, to legitimize and cover over, mass murder. The word “apology” is in the air, this week the CEO of Volkswagen in America used it to hide the falsification of emissions standards, and Mary Barra, CEO of GM, used it earlier in addressing corporate employees, the tenor of her congressional testimony being to the same effect: Forgive us our sins, for we know not what evil we wrought (in this case, mass murder by engineering license, failing for years to blow the whistle on a defective ignition switch). All three cases are related, the moral evasion of capitalism for the victims it creates and/or the laws it has broken.

I should say, interrelated, because the mentality created by capitalism from its earliest formative stages has been self-willed aggrandizement directed, even with collusion present, to all comers. Obama feels no more sorrow for the bombing of the Kunduz hospital than do the others for their illicit deeds—the important thing is not to get caught, lest the whole bloody edifice tumble. Deliberate criminal intent is built-into the DNA of the political-business-military leadership, safely assured that it will be all for one, one for all. The mechanism to ensure that wrongdoing goes unpunished is self-regulation, as opposed to transparent and independent investigation, in which the Pentagon, VW, and GM control the process. Apology = whitewash, criminality somehow twisted into charges against the victim or the whistleblower. How many Americans would love to see Snowden kidnapped from Russia and hung in America, so deep does the obfuscation of moral truth run. Nothing must be allowed to upset the pride in and complacency with the System, now international so that what happens in America affects Germany (and the whole of the EU, and for good measure the ground-rules drawn up for corporate privilege and protection in the Trans-Pacific Partnership). And vice versa.

This is the glory of globalization, one happy family of the Elect to the exclusion of the Adversary, so that ethnocentrism reigns supreme as a political, economic, military principle to be acted on, whether Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, North Africa, Latin America, etc. At every tender point of contact with reality, as in regime change or safeguarding mammoth corporations, the response is the same—apologize when flagrantly caught and move on, hoping a fickle public will ignore the moral turpitude joyously awash in its consumerism, or stand resolute, admit nothing, and obfuscate till the cows come home. In the last analysis be assured the predominant institutions take care of their own, and if needed, commence the search for a scapegoat in the lower ranks.

Apology is a pro forma admission of guilt, if even that, whose sole function is exonerative: the scales of justice have now been righted. They haven’t, the imbalance is even worse, with legal principles and the entire jurisprudential framework for sale to the highest bidder, including USG in its efforts to ward off accusations of war crimes. The military and business alike have a vested interest in legal fabrication to suit their ends, DOJ in a support role itself supplemented by the sheer

financial-political power of mega-corporations. Have we reached the stage of irreversible systemic flow?

Let's turn now to the aforementioned cases. The New York Times, in a Reuters dispatch, "Obama Apologizes for Kunduz Attack, MSF Demands Independent Probe," (Oct. 7), points up what are irreconcilable differences between the two sides, apology notwithstanding, for "the medical charity pressed its demand for an international commission to investigate what it calls a war crime" (score one for NYT in casting doubt—"what it calls"—a war crime). MSF stated that "an independent commission created under the Geneva Convention in 1991 should be activated for the first time to handle the inquiry." Obama, a resounding No, the terms of the convention reinforcing his obstruction: parties to an investigation must give their consent, the US flatly refusing to go along. Instead, he phoned MSF international president, Joanne Liu, to apologize, according to Josh Earnest, but then when asked "whether Obama offered some explanation to Liu," we see the same answer: "Earnest said no."

How Obama thinks this is acceptable reveals the administration's hubris and cavalier handling of the truth. Obstruction (i.e., self-regulation) is as far as he would go: "Earnest said Obama told Liu that a U.S. investigation would 'provide a transparent, thorough and objective accounting of the facts and circumstances of the incident. [Unprovoked mass murder is an incident.] And that, if necessary, the president would implement changes to make tragedies like this one less likely to occur in the future.'" Liu, holding that MSF would continue its investigation as best it could, had this to say at a briefing in Geneva—words that probably could not crack the rigid psychological/defensive armor of the American mindset: "If we let this go, as if it was a non-event, we are basically giving a blank check to any countries who are at war. If we don't safeguard that medical space for us to do our activities, then it is impossible to work in other contexts like Syria, South Sudan, like Yemen."

We learn that the US and Afghanistan "were not signatories to the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC)," to which Jason Cone, executive director of MSF in the US, called on Obama "to consent to the commission." At a New York news conference, Cone said, "Doing so will send a powerful signal of the U.S. government's commitment to and respect for international humanitarian law under rules of war." Instead, back on the phone, Obama called Afghan president Ghani "to express his condolences," labelling the bombing "a mistake,"—a word, next to apology and collateral damage, which sits well with the vanity of empire. Liu, after discussion of the work of the hospital, said, "Today we say enough, even war has rules."

Brian Fung's article in the Washington Post, "Volkswagen's U.S. CEO apologizes for emissions cheating scandal," (Oct. 8), instances another phony mea culpa in the service of corporate rapacity and the prevention of independent investigation and possible prosecution (as of now, blame being assigned to two lower-level engineers acting alone). Michael Horn, head of VW America, stated before the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee, "On behalf of our company and my colleagues in Germany, I would like to offer a sincere apology. These events are deeply troubling. I did not think that something like this was possible at the Volkswagen Group." That is a big gulp for me, given that 11 million of its cars worldwide (500,00 in the US), Fung writes, "were outfitted with a 'defeat device' that allowed it to cheat on emissions tests."

Perhaps more interesting is the cloak of corporate deniability thrown around the cheating which took place. The problem was not new. Yet Horn claimed it was only “a 2014 report by West Virginia researchers that initially indicated there was a problem,” and in his case, not until Sept. 3 of this year was he made aware of the report, which “merely indicated an emissions problem ... not evidence of cheating.” He stuck to his story, even Republican members of the subcommittee expressing disbelief. EPA is in charge of the investigation, not a reassuring sign of criminal prosecution. Is there a relation between this cheating and climate change, as well as the direct health especially of children? Fung writes: “Volkswagen last month admitted to putting special software in its diesel cars that instructed the vehicles to emit less pollution during testing. On the open roads, however, the cars created up to 40 times the nitrogen oxide allowable by law. Untreated diesel exhaust has been identified as a significant contributor to respiratory illness, particularly among asthma patients, the elderly and children.” Good corporate citizens!

General Motors also must be considered, even more so, for a good corporate citizenship award, Geoff Colvin’s article in *Fortune*, “How CEO Mary Barra is using the ignition-switch scandal to change GM’s culture,” (Sept. 18), exquisitely turning long-term mass murder into a positive good, the transformation of General Motors into, not a corporate giant, but a caring public service or servant. Colvin casually dispatches the deaths—presumably par for the course in the industry, the fine levied insuring against criminal prosecution: “The agreement by GM to pay a \$900-million fine settles criminal charges the U.S. had made against the company for wire fraud and withholding information from regulators about a defective ignition switch that has been blamed for over 100 deaths. The tragic events are not especially surprising in the auto industry. [A cynicism to be expected in *Fortune*] Mistakes are made, lives are lost, cases are settled. What’s new and worth watching is the way Barra is handling the case.” Yes, apology follows.

“‘I never want to put this behind us,’ she told employees at a town hall meeting that stunned many of them.” Apparently GM seldom if ever apologizes. The account continues: “She apologized publicly and profusely, visited the families of victims, and set up a compensation fund for them before any legal liability had been established.” Still, after years of the defective ignition switch causing deaths, Barra can only treat this as a mistake—speak no evil, hear no evil, see no evil, dating back years. “‘The mistakes that led to the ignition-switch recall should never have happened. We have apologized and we do so again today. I believe our response has been unprecedented in terms of candor, cooperation, transparency, and compassion.’” And well it might be, because it got GM out of a tight hole. Thus, US prosecutor Preet Bharara praised the corporation profusely, “the cooperation by GM executives had been ‘fairly extraordinary .... It’s the reason we’re here after 18 months rather than four years.’”

Apology wards off criticism, mitigates damage, avoids prosecution—a word cheapened in practice to justify criminal behavior and possibly worse, as in bombing hospitals, poisoning the atmosphere, depriving innocent people of their lives. Obama, Horn, Barra, and countless others, on the roller coaster of capitalism where every action—military, economic, political, ideological—is fully justified in preserving the System, its profitability, its ruthlessness, its alienation, no thought need be given to the MSF patients burned to death in their beds in the ICU unit in Kunduz. The world is shrinking, practices becoming uniform and interchangeable, barbarism the rule rather than the exception, as dark war clouds loom on the horizon.

OCTOBER 19, 2015

## **Israel's Defamation of Judaism: The Rape of the Palestinian People**

Israel has come a long way since 1967 in the construction of an apartheid state and society with respect to the Palestinians, in truth, the proto-Nazification of policy and conduct in which the gas chamber has been replaced by the more protracted denial of life to the victims of an ethnocentric/racial ideology achieved through the degradation of a whole people: a faucet of inhumanity left running, where genocide is administered in drips rather than in a torrent. But even the latter holds, as now, as the misery and hopelessness sinks into the consciousness of the oppressed, almost as a conscious strategy of still more acute humiliation in the hope that signs of resistance will give pretext and excuse for a show of force and further clamping down.

The bombardment of Gaza last summer, a replay of Guernica as a lengthier exercise in domination, artillery replacing the dive bomber, was merely an example of the stored-up hatred and contempt Israelis displayed toward the Palestinians, a twisted mindset crossing the line from punitiveness to outright psychosis as though squashing an ant hill. Israelis do not concede the humanity of their victims, and perhaps do not even see them as victims but mere objects to be pushed around and, as a useful object lesson to them, swept aside, their houses bulldozed, their land taken away, the science of humiliation raised to a fine art. I turn now to the New York Times article by Jodi Rudoren, "East Jerusalem, Bubbling Over With Despair," Oct. 18, a more sympathetic account of the Palestinians' plight than is the wont of The Times, and therefore to be taken seriously given the usual partiality of the paper.

This, remember, is only now, and not a summary of the decades of oppression which provide context for the events of today. She writes: "East Jerusalem, long the emotional heart of Palestinian life, is now the fiery soul of its discontent." The recent stabbing attacks—which in my heart I cannot condemn so much as recognize as the desperation of youth otherwise powerless, without dignity or opportunity, they and their parents denied an honorable identity, and hence striking out in any way they can—originated "from within the city's borders," an area which also finds, for example, "Fuad Hamed, a successful businessman who condemns the wave of violence but shares the frustration and alienation underlying this new uprising." Well stated, and I guess what I meant above is that Israelis share in the crimes with equal blood on their hands. Youths do not take knife in hand unless under severest provocation, knowing they will be killed instantly and retaliation taken on their parents. To Israelis, however, they are animals, nothing more, as a way of shielding from the Israeli mind, as a gigantic defense mechanism, the barbarism practiced.

(The scene, not in Rudoren's account: a knife-wielding teenager, shot multiple times, lying dead on the pavement; a crowd gathers, chanting, "Son of a whore," "Son of a whore.")

We see the situation through the eyes of Abu Hamed, hardly an extremist. At 44, he lectures at Hebrew University, "runs two clinics in Israel's health system, and lives on a comfortable home among Sur Baher's [a neighborhood of 18,000] tangle of crowded hills." From his balcony he sees "sprawling Jewish enclaves that he said were 'built on our lands,' and the ugly barrier Israel erected that splits Sur Baher from the occupied West Bank." (Rudoren has the grace to use the word "occupied.") Hamed takes in more: "These days, he can also see the Israeli soldiers who have blocked two of the neighborhood's exits and set up a checkpoint to search cars [and people, a photo showing a man raising his shirt before a soldier, rifle in hand] at the third, making the city's psychic



division all the more concrete.” This, a well-to-do section of Jerusalem, not like the poverty found in the Old City and elsewhere. Hamed: ““You have a lot of evidence that you are not a human being.””

He continues: ““The problem is the policy, because all the time as a Palestinian here you feel that they want to take you out of the city, you have a lot of problems that do not allow you to feel that you are part of the city. IT’S KILLING FROM INSIDE ALL THE TIME.”” (emphasis added) This is a form of genocide practiced internally, and reminds me—“they do not allow you to feel that you are part of the city”—of the system of segregation I witnessed and was repulsed by, growing up in the American South. Rudoren, in highlighting the feelings on both sides, raises the point that Jerusalem’s Palestinians feel “like the neglected stepchildren of both City Hall and the Palestinian Authority, which is headquartered in the West Bank and is barred from operating in Jerusalem. They do not feel wanted here, or part of what is happening there.” An enforced separation, yet frustration, one also surmises, because of Ramallah’s lackluster militancy and lack of leadership.

Rudoren explains further: “Civic and cultural institutions decamped years ago for the West Bank city of Ramallah. In Arab East Jerusalem, there are too few classrooms, and too many dropouts. It is difficult to get a permit to expand a home; 98 illegal structures were demolished last year. Three-quarters of the population lives below Israel’s poverty line.” This last is the clincher, and can be multiplied throughout the territories, from the squalor of living conditions to the blockade preventing medicines from reaching Gaza. City residency permits local travel for Palestinians, yet that only reveals to them the heightened contrast in lifestyle between themselves and Israelis. In the words of Sari Nusseibeh, a past president of Al Quds University: ““On the one hand, yes, you have open access to Israeli society—on the other hand you also have more knowledge about the discrimination that’s being practiced against you. Major issues that you identify with as a Palestinian and a Muslim, your dignity and self-respect, your position, your role, these are in total and constant conflict.””

The upshot? Rudoren readily admits that the recent stabbings “that have killed seven Israeli Jews, five of them in Jerusalem, since Oct. 1,” as well as “at least 16 suspected assailants ... shot dead by Israelis ... along with more than 20 other Palestinians in clashes with security forces,” have a longer-term causation. At the very least, “East Jerusalem has been a hotbed since July 2014, when Jewish extremists kidnapped and murdered [i.e., burned him alive] Muhammad Abu Khdeir, a 16-year-old from the Shufat neighborhood.” Following that, there were approximately 1,600 stone-throwing incidents over the next three months and 700 arrested. This year, Sept. 13-Oct 15, 380 were detained, “171 of them minors.” The account does not relate the armed response, including the use of live ammunition.

Some background: “Arab East Jerusalem is not a single place but a series of some two dozen disparate satellites.” Hamed’s neighborhood is better off; many are overcrowded, poverty-ridden, somewhat isolated. How did it get this way? Rudoren’s discussion is forthright: “Israel captured it all from Jordan in the 1967 war, and expanded Jerusalem’s boundaries to 27 square miles from 2.3. Israel’s annexation was rejected by the United Nations, and most of the world considers the territory occupied.” She adds, “Today, 200,000 Jews live beyond Israel’s original border, most in new developments—widely considered illegal settlements—like those Mr. Abu Hamed can see from his balcony, 2,000 scattered among the Palestinian enclaves.”

To all intents and purposes, Jerusalem personifies apartheid, Hamed's own neighborhood each day having a "line of cars at the lone remaining exit ... stretched for hundreds of yards," and, as an example, "Moussa Dabash, 44, who runs a tour-bus company, said he was searched under his shirt and between his legs." This is a microcosm of the imposed dependence and humiliation: "If I say a word, they'll accuse me of trying to stab them," he said. The soldier who searched me, I told him, 'Why are you doing this?' He said, 'Because you are terrorists.'" Hamed, also delayed, related that "a couple and their two children died in a fire last year .... because engines are dispatched to Sur Baher from another Palestinian neighborhood rather than from the closer Jewish ones."

That is not the Judaism I grew up with and was raised in, inceptively small "d" democratic in every respect, particularly on issues of race and poverty. As Jews, we knew discrimination and could more readily empathize with those also discriminated against, blacks, those in poverty, other minorities, labor in general, all the while rising above the grubbiness and intolerance of an America, already in the 1940s from the standpoint of my personal experience, saturated in conspicuous consumption, xenophobia, antiradical, rising above—even if an escape—to beauty and excellence in everything from human intelligence to sports to aesthetics, participation in the universality of creativity in whatever form it took. This did not have to be an exclusively Jewish trait, and indeed it was the very spirit of cosmopolitanism that gave it energy and a certain sublimity, and freed it from chauvinistic dogmatism. Jews, whether observant or secular, identified with the common man, using the term unself-consciously, just as in the 1940s, and before my adolescence, in the 1930s, antifascist. That is the Judaism Israel has defamed, I might even say, desecrated, so that rape of the Palestinians, as in the title, refers not just to their bodies, but their identity of personhood, their being, that has been violated.

My New York Times Comment on the Rudoren article, same date, follows:

As a Jew, I am deeply ashamed of Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians. Israel is a horrible corruption of Judaism, a world religion identified before the 1960s with a deeply penetrating HUMANISM that was reflected in knowledge, observance, music, the arts in general, scientific learning and mathematics, and liberal politics. Now, so much of that rich heritage is gone, insulted by the actions, condescension, ethos of contemporary Israel, and infecting all of world Jewry.

Israelis have shown themselves beyond cruelty, an internalization of the very darkness that resulted in the Holocaust, only now it is the Palestinians of today who are the Jews of yesterday and the Israelis of today who show the arrogance of those who formerly persecuted the Jews. Israelis gleefully show their muscle at every turn, delighting in the humiliation of the Palestinians and not realizing how this not only violates the teachings of Torah but reveals the inner evil and psychological rot of those who dominate.

How sticks and stones, even knives, can be taken as other than marks of desperation, as meanwhile Israeli security forces have the latest, most lethal weapons, and are prepared to use them as a reflex action, shows the gross imbalance of force. How did it come to this? As a youth growing up in the 1940s-50s I saw Israel as the paragon of democratic socialism (even then I was unaware of the the start of ethnic cleansing and contempt for the Palestinians). Far worse today.

OCTOBER 21, 2015

## **America's Self-Imposed Iron Curtain: Denial of Global Aggression**

A social psychiatry is needed to apprehend the mammoth collective defense mechanism within which the US has become comfortably ensconced to hide, particularly from itself, its treachery and perfidy on the world scene. The convenient amnesia of belligerence and wrongdoing has reached its apogee under Obama, who has proven far worse than Clinton, if that were possible, or rather together in the consolidated process of Empire-building of US Monopoly Capitalism. A case in point: We are told an impending financial decline in the world is exclusively China's fault, i.e., its failure to maintain its phenomenal rate of growth in the tightly structured context of globalization. The burden of the world's prosperity rests on China's shoulders. Nonsense.

The US, supplemented by its designated shock troops, the World Bank, IMF, WTO, has created a solipsistic fortress of political righteousness to energize while covering over the unrestrained growth of a corrupt/besotted capitalism engaged in promoting fictitious values rather than the presumed goal of production for the market. Even by Marxian standards, American capitalism has lost its way, the expected consequences of alienation and profit maximization, bad enough when judged alongside humane standards of societal betterment, instead descends into the veritable hell of debt-financed war-making looking to maintaining unilateral global supremacy as the condition of fending off a catastrophic depression affecting, foremost, itself.

This encasement in mythic Exceptionalism, a recognizable mental disorder because tenable only when positioned within an authoritarian state of extreme ego-loss, in turn calling forth the projection of an Enemy or Enemies to ward off doubts of inadequacy and the perpetration of evil, is where we're currently at: China, and to a lesser extent now, Russia, vindicates the US posture of war, intervention, covert action, regime change, whatever the mind of the tyrant or bully can conceive—as setting up a barrier to self-awareness of international war-criminality and domestic accelerated destruction of democracy.

Seemingly little things matter, for they illuminate the criminal framework of the whole, here, the nuts-and-bolts of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's cherry atop the cake of American-defined globalization, an insidious ploy to ensure US market penetration by stealth rather than, in the good old days, by battleship, Gallagher and Robinson's famous Imperialism of Free Trade, written decades ago, and considerably advanced in modern form. Under the radar (for disgracefully, the terms have still not been made public, and an ironclad fast-track process of approval provided worthy of any totalitarian regime, vote up or down, no deliberation—jam it through!), we see the US Chamber of Commerce exerting pressure to eliminate anti-smoking laws among the signatories, or John Castellani, president of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, lobbying to ensure patent extensions on drugs, to the detriment of the world health community. TPP stands for market exclusivity—it also stands for America's right to foist its products, at the expense of lung disease and availability of generics, on a global populace.

It gets worse, on domestic content regulations, currency stabilization, whatever one-sided arrangements benefit America, yet even then, we have not begun to tap the use of trade for geopolitical (read: anti-Chinese) objectives, the re-defining of the world structure to prevent America's own decline. US capitalism, I grant, is capable of multitasking: advancing financial-commercial goals, simultaneously militarizing strategic planning in order to hem-in and isolate

China on the world scene. Confrontation becomes the surrogate for economic growth. In fact, this is not multitasking. The two are inseparable, market expansion, the lifeblood of US capitalism, given its fashioning of underconsumption and labor degradation in its formative stages of industrial development, which otherwise would have resulted in endemic recession, has always been accompanied by the use or threat of military support. For America, trade rivalry has been either cause or consequence of war, knocking its Exceptionalism into a cocked hat because a condition rooted in capitalism itself.

We play the game of imperialism perhaps better than other powers because recognizing quite early that colonialism is not worth the candle, and, going further, valuing unilateralism to wield a free-hand in international politics and economics. There she stands: business giantism at the end of its tether, and in search of scapegoats to erase the memory of its past and contemporary egregious performance, from the standpoint not only of growth, wealth distribution, provisions of health and social welfare, infrastructure improvement, but also, more importantly, human rights at home and abroad. Symbolically, Obama's record-breaking drone assassinations speaks to the moral bankruptcy of military capitalism, a practice largely suppressed in the American psyche. And if a nation can get away with reigning down death from the skies with impunity (or bombing a clearly demarcated hospital), its behavior in the larger arena (drone assassination being only the proverbial tip of the iceberg and/or microcosm of US intent and planning) hardly surprises.

The Iron Curtain of the Cold War has given way to a more porous New Cold War with respect to China primarily, as if to say Russia has already been reduced to second-class status. (Not so, of course, except in the arrogant mindset of American political and military leaders). Ironically, though, the psychoanalytic characteristics of the Old have now been directed inward, perhaps the enormity of the war crimes fostering a depth of denial which erases all traces of wrongful conduct, as in the way we speak of collateral damage (a euphemism to explain away deliberate actions leading to the murder of innocent people—as e.g., in targeting wedding parties among others). Whether in Iraq or Afghanistan—a recitation of America's global military presence can be suggested ad infinitum—or the longer term containment of Russia which translates into the dangerous policy of encirclement, antidemocratic/prowar tendencies in American society are taking their psychological toll, more xenophobia, more pent-up hostility, more ethnocentrism, delusions of grandeur, all teetering on the point of a massive explosion.

And now China, the full-dress rehearsal for a new ball game, focalizing discontents on a target imputed to harbor aggressions which, mirror-like, reflect America's own inner feelings, needs, conception of the future. The Trans-Pacific Partnership sans China is the signal for aggression, first through trade, and then, as with the EU and NATO, its conversion from a commercial to a military alliance system, America, as elsewhere, the chief architect of the arrangement. Let me turn now to a rather bland (given its usual China-bashing) New York Times article by Neil Gough entitled "Discordant Financial Messages From China Spur Global Unease," (Oct. 20), to gain a further sense of what the TPP entails. As his title implies, China is to blame for global financial concerns. The principal reason, reading between the lines, is not a slowing of the growth rate, but a failure to proceed rapidly and thoroughly enough with privatization.

Gough writes: "China's bungled stock market bailout was a significant setback to its decades-long efforts to build a modern financial system." Circumlocutions notwithstanding throughout the article, that financial system must include none other than privatization. His complaint over

currency devaluation (which TPP itself is designed to prevent, although not stated here) is less important than, if presumably related to, said privatization: “A highly anticipated package of overhauls to sprawling state-owned companies was a crushing rebuke to hopes that China would move to privatize such businesses. Instead of reducing their stakes, the Communist Party said it would increase its controls over such companies.” Is there an economic equivalent of the phrase, “Better dead, than red,” for that seems to be the American prevailing thought—perhaps enough eventually to go to war over, should such companies not be wrested from the clutches of the Communist Party.

Poor China; to Gough it is practically falling apart, resulting from its failure to adopt capitalism across the board. (In passing, capitalism is not satisfied unless it is completely totalized, mixed elements, as actually now exists in China, being unacceptable to the US and the investor class.) Thus he continues: “To many global policy makers and investors, China’s spate of surprises [i.e., favoring and/or protecting state-owned enterprises] is driven by the government’s need to get the economy back on track.” Evidently the wrong track. Only 6.9% growth rate in the third quarter, as reported Oct. 19—probably the envy still of Western countries. He goes on: “While President Xi Jinping says the country is committed to financial reform, the resulting measures send the message that China is backpedaling on those efforts. It is a new and shifting landscape that is proving difficult for the rest of the world to navigate.”

For illustration, Gough quotes Fraser Howie, long-time banker in Asia and co-author of “Red Capitalism: The Fragile Financial Foundation of China’s Extraordinary Rise,” who put the matter succinctly: “People say reform is coming, but you’re giving back your reforms. That defeats the whole purpose; YOU EITHER EMBRACE MARKETS OR NOT.” (Emphasis mine) So we enter the coded world of IMF-World Bank semantics in which embracing markets can have only a capitalist referent, leaning toward American multinationals in an American-tailored trading system. Moreover, China is beyond the pale, its technocrats and competing agencies making for a “collective result” that is “difficult to discern” about “exactly what is happening in China.” Officials are backward thinking as well as sowing confusion among the investor class. “From the outside,” Gough notes, “officials appear to be changing course on long-held reform plans that are broadly considered critical for the health of the economy.”

Capitalism uber alles, no compromises here from the US perspective, and even then China’s admission to the TPP would have to wait till hell freezes over. China’s stock market tumbled following its finance minister’s planned assistance to corporate start-ups (which he has now rescinded), eliciting this response from Matthew Goodman, Asian trade expert, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies: “The stock-market rescue revived questions regarding the leadership’s commitment to economic liberalization and whether that is even what the administration means by reform. It is now pretty clear that things are not going according to plan.” Perhaps they are, perhaps China is having second thoughts about capitalist totalization.

Andrew Batson, of Gavekal Dragonomics, a financial consultancy in Beijing, seems to think so, that Xi Jinping is taking greater control of the economy, to the detriment of a flat-out capitalist market philosophy and economy: “The focus on centralizing authority has been a big theme of Xi’s, and also this more politicized and nationalist environment that Xi has inaugurated has had very clear effects on the progress of economic reform. That is not necessarily 100 percent negative. But it’s certainly not the universally pro-market reform agenda that some people were expecting.”

To Barack Obama it is not 100 but 200 percent negative, financial reform admitting of only one interpretation. But for those, I include myself, who value a socialist economy and society for its redistributive-justice potential, its moral outlook of humanism, its assault on alienation—rooted in the commodity structure of capitalism, and grant capitalism a subsidiary or nondominant role in the organization of political economy, culture, and wealth-allocation, democratization the criterion for its continued operation, then it is crucial to be illusion-free concerning China. For it, too, has thus far conceded more to capitalism and its institutional framework than I would wish to see if socialism is to remain a vital and viable world pattern of development. China, like Russia, may well be at a tipping point (in Russia's case possibly already over the edge), not that a mixed economy is to be eschewed, but that the superimposition of concentrated wealth and power into a unified hierarchical political order, which I conceive capitalism to be, rejects and repudiates the world's progressive future.

China, under Xi, appears caught in-between, the dismantlement of socialism a tendency which is difficult to reverse when once started. The US's confrontational posture, carried well beyond TPP to the military pivot to the Pacific, conceivably could compel China's return to socialism in light of the hostile world order awaiting it—but there are no assurances that capitalism would be arrested in China. Gough reports that Prime Minister Li Keqiang “met with the leaders of some of China's biggest banks on Friday [October 16] and issued a broad promise to prop up companies in financial trouble.” Li: China “will not cut or withdraw loans to those companies with difficulties but good market prospects.” And it will “give necessary capital support to companies undergoing bankruptcies or regrouping.” Yet, keeping in mind the American-sponsored equation of reform and privatization, there is some promise of a trend-reversal, as witness the Communist Party Central Committee's “bluntly rul[ing] out loosening the party's grip on state firms.” This party leadership “is vital to ensuring the socialist direction of their development.”

My New York Times Comment on the Gough article, same date, follows:

“Financial reform” = privatization. Nothing less will satisfy the West and investors in general. Is 6.9% growth, given the rest of global performance, to be ridiculed? Nothing in the article indicates that it is corporate DEBT in the developed economies that is at the heart of the current financial downturn. China can handle its debt problems with state-owned enterprise. It is not the cause of looming recession (if not worse), yet China makes a convenient scapegoat for US and other corporations which are heavily indebted and market questionable financial products.

It is too soon to proclaim capitalism triumphant, or at least the kind of capitalism predicated on greed and behaving like a loose cannon. The Times emphasizes chaos and confusion in China, and yet without the state sector one would see far worse damage to the world economy.

OCTOBER 23, 2015

## **The Curse of Growth: Accelerated Climate Change**



As Veblen might have said, conspicuous consumption = the objectification of waste, an equation at the core of modern capitalism grounded in the exploitation of the laborer as the *raison d'être* for the creation of surplus value. Quite a mouthful? No, a straightforward description of a System whose excessiveness in all things pertinent to the accumulation of power and wealth for upper groups has brought humankind to a condition of ecocide that threatens the habitable existence of the planet. Naomi Klein in her recent book had it right, the abhorrent contradiction of politicized economic development having structurally produced global inequality now stands, and has for some time, in direct opposition to the reduction of carbon emissions as a primary factor in global warming. Implicitly, she goes further: the culprit, beyond carbon emissions in the wanton destruction of the Earth, is the societal framework which makes possible and sustains growth on terms deleterious to nature.

Thus far the issue of emissions has been disconnected from the necessity for a systemic transformation of society and political economy if climate change is to be brought under control and seemingly irreversible trends not only halted but reversed. Is it too late? If so, at least progressive forces cannot give up without a fight, one that somehow may activate regenerative energies hitherto latent in nature's struggle to surmount human cruelty, greed, and error. Capitalism is the enemy of nature; we have seen that as built into a predaceous mindset. I say this, not in the spirit of Thoreuvian romanticism, which nonetheless had its valued ascetic personal standard, so much needed today, but in the praxis of uncompromising militancy directed to de-privileging financial-industrial elites and their political servants, in America and worldwide.

Global warming is, as the phrase denotes, a global phenomenon. It is like a noxious infectious disease, the virulent initial carrier being the multinational corporation. But that is only surface, an inherent dynamic of unrestrained capitalism which itself is not predetermined or inevitable so much as the product of war, imperialism, exigencies of profit maximization and securing the natural

resources critical to an industrial civilization. Behind the putative ineluctable economic tendencies stands the long arm of CLASS; oppression-repression-impoverishment do not just happen, dropping from the skies of a benign or malignant divinity (depending on which side one is on), but, like global warming itself, result from human activity as the predominating factor in shaping outcomes. To avoid the inclusive criminality of capitalism in the effort to rectify current trends is to ignore global warming itself and blissfully continue as usual.

The human race is, or should be, made of sterner/better stuff. Raising living standards for all is more than a noble moral aspiration; beyond defining an altruistic sensibility distinguishing man/woman from lower animals, it is the key to human survival. Nothing less. I say this because growth as it has occurred in the so-called advanced nations, notably the US, where capitalism, in the absence of European feudalism (but not the institution of slavery, itself organized capitalistically), had taken on a purist form, created a globalized INEQUALITY which fuels (pardon the pun) unrestricted carbon emissions, differential stages of development with, for the less-developed countries, a veritable hell of outsourcing, cheapened labor standards, nonexistent pollution regulations, all pointing to top-down contamination of the environment.

In sum, the world structure of capitalism specifically, and I think deliberately as the beguiling shortsighted voice of the asocial, pell-mell drive for aggrandizement, results in displacing the atmospheric poisons of nonrenewable sources of energy onto the still economically captive nations, an historical process of domination furthered through, indeed made possible by, the militarization—beyond the earlier stage of market penetration—of advanced capitalism. War is the handmaiden of global warming. Economic growth for one set of nations supposes or presupposes the retardation of growth in the economically vassal states. Not that coal, fracking, timber spoliation, etc., etc., will disappear from North America and the West, for exploitation of labor and disregard for the environment go with the territory, geographically and ideologically. Upper groups in their selfishness will never learn, or don't care to; instead, shift the social costs of wanton destructiveness they themselves are responsible for onto others in the name of progress.

World inequality is the mechanism for destruction of the planet, carbon emissions being only the pus finding its way to the surface of privilege. Curtail privilege, thereby redistributing wealth and destroying the ethos behind it, and the world has a chance for survival. Capitalism says otherwise: life is not worth living without hierarchy, the dominance of individuals and nations over others, and without waste—for waste, like domination, demonstrates superiority, ego-fulfillment in a society emptied of meaning, material striving filling the philosophical-emotional void. We demean ourselves, so why not nature as well? Anything standing for integrity must be demolished, lest reminding us of how far we have fallen from achieving human potentiality. Nature especially must be despoiled, its innocence and grandeur, its uncompromising will to live, the very opposite of our puerile will to power.

OCTOBER 28, 2015

### **Subi Reef and US Belligerence: America on the Warpath**

The Spratlys, in the South China Sea, have already been built upon by Vietnam and the Philippines, others also eying them, yet only China draws the ire of USG, an opportune move for invoking the Law of the Sea to press forward America's militarization of the Pacific specifically to



engineer a power-confrontation, long in the cards, with Beijing. The Obama legacy in foreign policy has shifted from the weakening of Russia via the demonization of Putin, incitement of the coup in Ukraine, and steady economic pressure, all reinforced by NATO's presence on its borders and suffusion of US military bases in the immediate region, initially for its own sake as a self-contained geopolitical goal, but then, more recently, with this hostile paradigm of indirect force against Russia as model and precedent to follow, attention has shifted to China, present for decades as a purposeful strategy, but under Obama Washington's cause celebre, perhaps even to the point of crowding out Russia from the picture. Thanks to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington has no shortage of ideas about advancing the confrontation with China. Here "freedom of navigation" as the stalking horse for raising the stakes already inherent in Obama's Pacific-first strategy and accompanying Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Seemingly devilishly clever, Obama (and of course, not alone, for he has the resources of Pentagon and intelligence-establishment brains behind him, as well as multinational corporate input) has sought to place China in a pincers-movement, two grasping jaws, militarization and trade, by which to enclose and squeeze China into if not total submission then at least a severe diminishment of global status, power, and economic might. The shift in direction toward China of course capitalizes on post-1949 policies and propaganda relentless in shaping American public opinion, with the Korean War using Ho as a proxy for the direct attack on Mao, but under Obama one discerns a qualitative escalation on all fronts, even Putin now looking somewhat better in comparison with Xi. China has become the designated Enemy of Choice in reanimating the Cold War, an obsessive preoccupation of America from the aftermath of World War II to the present, and, be assured, beyond, very much as though America requires massive defense spending (and accompanying translations into action, from war and intervention to regime change and covert operations) if its capitalism was to survive and prosper.

China is the life raft to keep America from recession and possibly worse, as well as accelerating the mal-distribution of wealth to hitherto unknown heights. As Sartre pointed out about anti-Semitism, if there were no Jews, Hitler would have had to invent them. American policymakers cling to their hostility of China as justification for constructing a quasi-fascist framework of government and society at home, defined as emphasis on the themes of ethnocentrism and xenophobia (combined together as Exceptionalism) to facilitate wealth concentration and the use of Pentagon outlays as excuse for savaging the social safety net in America—a formula euphemistically termed "austerity" rapidly spreading through the Western world, so that without China Washington would have to invent it. China is for America, what the Jew was for Nazi Germany, a scapegoat to legitimize ruling group ideology and activities in the furtherance of their own interests.

Let's turn for immediate background to Jane Perlez's article in the New York Times, entitled "Beijing Calls U.S. Warship's Route in South China Sea a 'Provocation,'" (Oct. 27), in which she quotes Lu Kang, of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, that the US guided-missile destroyer, Lassen, had committed a "deliberate provocation" by passing near the Subi Reef which China through extensive construction had reclaimed from the sea. Lu: "China will firmly react to this deliberate provocation. [It] will not condone any action that undermines China's security." Earlier, Lu called "the move an illegal incursion, adding, 'The relevant Chinese authorities have monitored, followed the U.S. warship and issued warnings.'" (The Pentagon said the Lassen was "accompanied by

surveillance aircraft.”) The American legal case against the dredging operation to create an island is that the Subi Reef is a low-tide elevation “not entitled to a 12-nautical-mile territorial limit, but only “a 500-meter safety zone.” Lu again: “If the relevant party [the US] keeps stirring things up, it will be necessary for China to speed up its construction activities.”

Be that as it may, i.e., the proper status of Subi under the Law of the Sea, this decision to build was not made in a vacuum, but rather, beyond the fact that other countries were doing the same in the South China Sea, China saw the recent shift of American policy to the Pacific, supported by carrier battle groups, joint-maneuvers with friends and allies, etc., as a clear sign of America’s hostile intent. And thus has acted accordingly. Naval power appears to be Obama’s Mahan-TR reincarnation of military strategy of a century-plus ago to back up the Open Door trade architecture, and sure enough Pacific-first is equally integrated with a still more aggressive trade architecture, the Trans-Pacific Partnership which gives American corporations the right to sue the governments of the other signatory nations (thirteen more on the Pacific Rim, China pointedly excluded from the TPP) whenever these corporations perceive an encroachment on their profits and market penetration. Anti-tobacco legislation is a no-no and other areas self-evidently compromise the sovereignty of the trading partners.

The Chinese are not blind to US intentions in the Pacific and against themselves in particular. Perlez quotes top naval brass in America on pushing ahead with the geostrategic/geopolitical agenda of maximizing American power and multinational profits in the region. E.g., head of US Pacific Command, Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., “has been an outspoken proponent of freedom-of-navigation patrols and has warned that the United States will conduct such forays whenever it sees fit.” Presumably with Obama’s blessing. And Harris’s predecessor, Admiral Dennis C. Blair, referring to Subi, stated, “This is simply unacceptable to the United States, and the United States will take strong military action, which will tend to move the issues from the civilian law enforcement to the military realm. There is a general feeling outside of China that it has now settled on a sustained policy of aggressive actions to support its claims, especially in the South China Sea, and that China has abandoned any ideas of compromise and negotiated solutions to the dispute.”

Blair may have been projecting the US position onto China, America not noticeably willing to compromise and negotiate solutions there or elsewhere. Instead, we see the objective of converting the South China Sea into an American Lake, proximity to China offering the requisite intimidation to put China in its place. Only it will not work. My New York Times Comment to the Perlez article, same date, follows:

Is anyone in Washington (i.e., the administration, the Pentagon) weighing Obama’s announcement of a Pacific-first strategy in evaluating the Chinese building activities? Simply, the US made the first move of aggressive intent by deploying major naval assets to the Pacific—and this, indisputably conjoined with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Washington does not hide its hostility to Beijing. It is there in the open, with TPP merely an economic mode of encirclement designed to isolate and contain China, possibly with an end view to eventual dismemberment. Literally, Obama is playing with fire, Democrats acting more belligerently, if that were possible, than Republicans.

One notes a strain of desperation in US policy, as though provocation would stave off the inevitable—an end to America’s UNILATERAL superpower status. Combine Pacific-first

and TPP with US-sponsored NATO moves in Europe directed against Russia, and you have the full plate of US “diplomacy,” a confrontational posture that surely cannot come to a good end.

OCTOBER 30, 2015

### **Presidential Timber? Termite-Infested Wood**

Patriotism = refuge of the fascist. He/she is the professional virgin of monopoly capitalism who protesteth too much a devotion to democracy while gnawing away at its foundations in the voracious appetite for Order, Profit, War. This was the essence of the third Republican debate: American Exceptionalism besieged at the gates by Big Government, a pristine privatization of mind, structure, values—the David to slay Goliath in the name of entrepreneurial freedom, lower taxes, a shrunken Welfare State, all coalescing into a potent war machine to universalize American market advantage and curb the activities of enemies of the state, both domestic and foreign.

Nothing changes; this has been the litany of the American political culture implemented by both major parties (with Democrats mounting a slightly more oblique attack on government) since the end of World War II, and the ideal ideological context paving the way for the Third. Watching the debate, one gained a privileged look into the seething cauldron of hatred for authentic democracy, which necessarily includes social justice, a comprehensive equalitarian system of wealth and power, the end to bloated militarism, an earnest desire for peace, and now, belatedly breaking the surface of consciousness, the political-structural reversal of climate change and custodianship of Nature’s heritage as the most prized possession of humankind—a cauldron of hatred, then, self-devouring the philosophic and practical underpinnings of a free society. It was that bad, yet not unexpected, just as careful scrutiny on the Democratic side in debates reveals a seemingly more subdued condemnation of democratic principles violated in fact by a disproportionate aggressiveness in foreign policy (I include Sanders here) which rules out societal well-being for all the people.

This is discouraging, as though civilization is becoming militarized-privatized out of existence, encompassed by a colossal instinctual death-wish, the product of an unsatisfied thirst for power no longer capable of permanent achievement as the world-system itself hedges in US unilateral domination of others’ aspirations and freedoms. America, accustomed to counterrevolutionary bliss in its global role as conservator of unrestrained capitalism, is experiencing doubts, not about its values and legitimation, but about its prowess, its military might to bludgeon home these values, ranging from the dynamics of internal wealth concentration to one of several corollaries, climate-destruction, or another, racial tension, or another, widespread poverty and disease affecting the lower-third of the population. Capitalism trumps commonwealth, fascism here operable through skipping over the stage of social democracy to reach an advanced stage of government-business interpenetration shielding corporate wealth from all moral obligation: an economy utterly contemptuous of society.

Those voices: the dismantlement of government as code for the abolition of regulation where the public good is involved. (Regulation drawn up by the vested interests, then enforced by government, which by and large is the history of regulation in America, starting with Theodore Roosevelt’s Bureau of Corporations and Woodrow Wilson’s Federal Reserve System, is another matter and the true meaning of interpenetration, drawing Capitalism and the State together into a

co-partnership of hierarchical wealth-protection and the public financing of imperialism and military power.) The voices: concern for the middle class as code for a plebeian fascism skillfully used as the stock-in-trade for disguising the roots of financial-commercial-industrial control of the state apparatus in the furtherance of still deeper private consolidation. Here the elephant in the room is foreign policy, shaping and assisting monopoly capitalism via everything from outsourcing, foreign investment, tax havens, trade alliances, the importing of critical raw materials and natural resources on favorable terms, to the direct intervention into the internal affairs of real and potential customers and partners of other nations globally. Foreign policy is equally germane to the domestic framework (which the candidates of both parties never talk about), the habituation to military gains, intervention, war as confirmation of American power and superiority, being a quite deliberate way to instill an attitude of acquiescence into the body politic for Authority, the continuation of militarism, and, aiming at blacks, other minorities, and working people in general, a deferential mindset toward presumed betters and the Nation itself.

Meanwhile, people and society alike are being bled to death through the astronomical military budget which leaves nothing over for, and serves as pretext for, the ruthless scrubbing of the social safety net. Wealth concentration corrodes the very vitals of the social order. And still, the presidential campaign goes on, leaving everything intact while whipping up enthusiasm for the Termites of Reaction to do their thing, chiefly, provoke international confrontation, divert attention from basic problems at home, enshrine the status quo in rotting wood.

NOVEMBER 2, 2015

### **Corporate Rescindment of Legal Rights: Business Power Run Amuck**

Capitalism requires constant manipulation of its accounts to increase profit margins, stealth in the service of uncontested power over the citizenry, a top-down one-way street of unrelieved abuse if the System is to be made to work exclusively on behalf of its industrial-financial-military elites, themselves constituting an increasingly well-organized ruling group. This means the up-ending and distortion of democratic government: interconnectivity above, a submissive people, facilitated through promoting false consciousness, below. Sound bitter? No, realistic, as peoples' rights recede further into the background, as the mandatory ratifying condition for the sanctification of property and free-market ideology.

America is the trail-blazer in world capitalism, perfecting schemes/techniques large and small for squeezing profits out of transactions of every kind and character, the latest to come to light being the legal assault on class-action suits, to be supplanted by a stacked deck of compulsory arbitration—in the case at hand, the nickel-and-diming of economic tyranny for the profits at stake, but also, more importantly, for confirmation of the absolutism of business power, as in America, in the advanced stage of capitalist development. Nothing must be conceded, all holes in the dike plugged, lest the system loses its grip over the people and begins—as is already happening—its downward trajectory (if not plummeting, in light of the desperation implied by the Big Squeeze).

Never mind the larger picture: counterrevolutionary America on the world scene, in which financial-business consolidation at home is simultaneous with war, intervention, covert action, regime change, drone assassination, embargoes, all as patterns of confrontation, market penetration, aggrandizement, military and diplomatic, abroad. Never mind, because this is well-worn ground,

gradually unfolding for over a century with few bright spots, that we're all used to. Instead, here in legal specifics is something comparatively new, and for once I can commend the New York Times on a job well done, exposure across the wide swath of American business of self-immunizing itself from legal challenges to destructive and illegal practices for which those on the receiving end have little or no recourse in fighting back. The consumer is a cipher to be kicked, raped, reduced to obedience.

I refer to Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Robert Gebeloff's article in *The Times*, "In the Fine Print: Arbitration Stacks the Deck of Justice," (Nov. 1), which, in the opening sentences, illustrates what the archetypal consumer (i.e., the American public) is up against—a slow death through the obscurantism of minutia: "On Page 5 of a credit card contract used by American Express, beneath an explainer on interest rates and late fees, past the details about annual membership, is a clause that most customers probably miss. If cardholders have a problem with their account, American Express explains, the company 'may elect to resolve any claim by individual arbitration.'" The reporters rightly call these words as "at the center of a far-reaching power play orchestrated by American corporations," in other words, nailing the coffin of business dominance over the people with yet another device of exploitation, one seemingly more gentle because enjoying the protection of the law and, as noted in the title, part of the small print few take the trouble to read, still fewer able to penetrate the gobbledy-gook to understand. They explain further: "By inserting INDIVIDUAL arbitration clauses into a soaring number of consumer and employment [equally important because defining the wages and conditions of work] contracts, companies like American Express devised a way to CIRCUMVENT the courts and bar people from joining together in class-action lawsuits, realistically the only tool citizens have to fight illegal or deceitful business practices." (emphasis, mine)

We see here the commodification of the legal profession, perhaps now more than ever, so that, despite the work of public-interest lawyers on behalf of the poor and neglected and in the areas of civil liberties, civil rights, consumer protection, antiwar and other forms of dissent, lawyerly acumen/trickery in the service of wealth and power sets the pace in the higher reaches, to the erosion if not defeat of the rule of law itself. (Naomi Klein's book, "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate," discusses how many of the most prestigious green foundations, with lawyers prominent in their organization, have accommodated to the climate-destruction policies of their adversaries, a perfect illustration of capitalist pressures—not confined to our topic—to achieve iron-clad security in business operations and the pursuit of profit.) David and Goliath, the individual against the megacorporation, defines, and has for some time, an uneven battleground under which the majesty of the law confers differential rights to the detriment of the people. Interconnectivity: the negation of class-action suits befits a nation whose citizenry, too, has been disadvantaged in halting the carbon-emissions practices of industry and business.

The sweeping nature of the concerted effort to deny legal recourse to the abuses people suffer in daily life is evident: "Over the last few years," the reporters state, "it has become increasingly difficult to apply for a credit card, use a cellphone, get cable or Internet service, or shop online without agreeing to private arbitration. The same applies to getting a job, renting a car or placing a relative in a nursing home." The very homeliness of the examples drives home both the insatiable desire for gain on the part of capitalism and the need for bringing the masses into acceptance of their economic subjugation. This is nothing new, only more intently pressed and thorough. The

account is replete with examples drawn from such disparate contexts/situations as to suggest the mounting of a universal capitalist offensive against the people: class action suits have been thrown out brought by Time Warner customers finding charges “mysteriously appear[ing] on their bills,” or against “a travel booking website accused of conspiring to fix hotel rates,” or black workers at Taco Bells “who said they were denied promotions, forced to work the worst shifts and subjected to degrading comments.” Blocking suits such as these is the mere nitty-gritty of a system that translates into bailing out giant banks, pampering and enriching defense contractors, spying on its own people, and, all-in-all, preserving a hierarchical class system in which business can do no wrong, confident that government has its back.

Law is an instrument of privilege, nowhere more than now. Take this example: “Patricia Rowe of Greenville, S.C., learned this firsthand when she initiated a class action against AT&T. Ms. Rowe, who was challenging a \$600 fee for canceling her phone service, was among more than 900 AT&T customers in three states who complained about excessive charges, state records show. When the case was thrown out last year, she was forced to give up and pay the \$600. Fighting AT&T on her own in arbitration ... would have cost far more.” To which the reporters add, “By banning class actions, companies have essentially disabled consumer challenges to practices like predatory lending, wage theft and discrimination, court records show.” The reach of corporate rapacity extends farther and farther afield with the discovery of each new stratagem or misuse of legal precedent. A Reagan-appointee, William G. Young, to the federal bench in Boston, recognizing the gravity of the situation, wrote: “‘This [banning class actions] is among the most profound shifts in our legal history. Ominously, business has a good chance of opting out of the legal system altogether and misbehaving without reproach.’”

The words burn on the page. The law, absent its jurisdiction over the most powerful members of the community, mocks democratic principles, Young, a federal judge, taking a position which is against the majority decision of the Supreme Court when cases were brought before it, in 2011 and 2013. I will not trace the preparatory ground for legal action led by “a coalition of credit-card companies and retailers,” culminating in the Court rulings that “enshrined the use of class-action bans in contracts.” Though corporations claimed that arbitration provided greater remedy than class-action suits, it was still the individual against giant firms, even to the point that the corporation often controlled the arbitration process. The Times found that, “based on thousands of court records and interviews with hundreds of lawyers, corporate executives, judges, arbitrators and plaintiffs in 35 states,” recourse to arbitration was practically impossible for most people, who then, because “blocked from going to court as a group,” simply “dropped their claims altogether.” The scorecard, of federal cases from 2010 to 2014: “Of 1,179 class actions that companies sought to push into arbitration, judges ruled in their favor in four out of every five cases.” As for upholding class-action bans in the first place, in 2014, 134 out of 162 cases.

No relenting on the economic front: “Some of the lawsuits involved small banking fees, including one brought by Citibank customers who said they were duped into buying insurance they were never eligible to use.” Why go the extra length? “Fees like this, multiplied over millions of customers, amount to billions of dollars in profits for companies.” The honor roll of abuses might be continued indefinitely; as the reporters note, “The data provides only part of the picture, since it does not capture the people who were dissuaded from filing class-actions.” Indeed, The Times investigation, seeking to correct for deficiencies in arbitration numbers, “since there is no central

database of arbitrations, found that nationwide over the 2010-2014 period, “only 505 consumers went to arbitration over a dispute of \$2,500 or less.” Examples: Verizon, with more than 125 million customers “faced 65 consumer arbitrations in those five years,” and Time Warner Cable, with 15 million, faced seven. The Times investigation found that one Citibank customer, stubborn about his rights, fought Citibank “in arbitration over a \$125 late fee on his credit card,” spending “three years and \$35,000” to rectify the situation in which “the erroneous charge ruined his credit score,” and he is vowing to continue the fight. The reporters wryly observe: “The odds are not in his favor. Roughly two-thirds of consumers contesting credit card fraud, fees or costly loans received no monetary awards in arbitration, according to the The Times’s data.”

Everybody is getting on the bandwagon: “Taking Wall Street’s lead, businesses—including obstetrics practices, private schools and funeral homes—have employed arbitration clauses to shield themselves from liability,” and the thousands of cases that have been brought by “single plaintiffs over fraud, wrongful death and rape are now being decided behind closed doors.” Is this unfair? A violation of due process? A stacked deck against the people? The reporters write: “And the rules of arbitration largely favor companies, which can even steer cases to friendly arbitrators, interviews and records show.” Other examples are cited, like Alan Carson, who has an offbeat restaurant, Italian Colors, in Oakland, and who “sued American Express on behalf of small businesses over steep processing fees [30% higher than Visa’s or MasterCard’s]” but were unable to cut away from American Express corporate cards because this would hurt profits. The case proceeded to trial, *Italian Colors v. American Express*, moving through the courts over the next ten years—in the same period that “the alliance of corporate interests ... had already been strategizing on how to eliminate class actions.” (Toss in the car makers with the others.) Once more the odds are too great; the system is not rigged, so much it contains within itself the outcome favorable to capitalism, and by capitalism I mean, not the Oakland restaurant in a strip mall which features spaghetti Bolognese and has crayons and butcher paper on the tables, but CAPITALISM in its grandiose display of power, contemptuous of all who stand in the way of its mountainous profits, whether critic or small businessperson like Alan Carson, and which finds militarism essential to its progress abroad and conducive to the social discipline of the people at home.

Consumerism is a form of obedience to the ruling groups, a submission to the authority of the dollar. Eliminating class-actions is one more instance providing a glimpse into the underside of the Leviathan, which feeds on eliminating popular rights and the redress of grievances. What is Carson in a match-up with Alan Kaplinsky of Ballard Spahr in representing the banking industry? Or when lawyers of Wilmer Hale get into the act, calling a conference in July 1999 (the date is significant in showing the early start of the campaign to nullify the results of arbitration) to which “representatives from Bank of America, Chase, Citigroup, Discover, Sears, Toyota and General Electric,” and others were invited and attended? Arbitration, the reporters point out, was designed “to kill class actions,” and, I would add, to kill itself. The arbitration clause that became widely adopted by many of these firms banned class-action suits. In passing, John Roberts, who represented Discover in opposing class-action suits, later became Chief Justice of the United States as part of the majority in ruling against these suits.

My New York Times Comment on the Silver-Greenberg and Gebeloff article, same date, follows:

Justice Sotomayer recused herself, Chief Justice Roberts did not, in cases involving class-action bans. How can Roberts profess the rule of law when his own actions endanger it? The Times has here rendered perhaps its best public service in years by following through on the rise of the arbitration clause. It is sickening to see the power-grab, the abuse, mounted by corporations against the American public. Cynicism, the degradation of principle, all done for the sake of profit. Yet, not surprising, as America further descends into the realm of amoral justification of essentially unregulated capitalism and contempt for the social-welfare policies and programs of government.

From unconscionable global warming to massive allocations to the military, the corporate system is running out of control. What is democracy, when legal principles are the plaything of the powerful? The US stands exposed to the world for its hypocrisy, the ban on class-action suits representing but one example of the wider shift away from constitutional observance and moral obligation one expects from the nation.

NOVEMBER 4, 2015

### **The Business Offensive: A Symmetrical Ruling Class**

Since the close of World War II, America has sought an integrated policy as the militarization of capitalism. In the intervening years, this was not always easy to achieve, as, depending on circumstances, one or the other, the corporate-financial order, and the military itself, asserted itself and made strong demands on government. The result was never an intracompetitive mold because each needed and recognized the value of the other, but still there were periods of imbalance in their respective surges of governmental policy-emphasis. American capitalism had become a functional duopoly (C. Wright Mills' *Power Elite* was a good popular discussion of this general structure at an earlier point in our capitalist-development trajectory after the war), the Cold War itself providing a cover for the US globalization of power via market penetration, international financial and monetary architecture under US supervision, and the steady build-up of an Armaments State.

There is nothing actually new here about the American historical pattern, except of course the more explicit and pronounced role to be assigned the military in the stabilization and expansion of American capitalism. The military was never at any point following the Civil War a negligible input in synthesizing the materials for an operational ruling class, but essentially, as in the late-19th century policy of the Open Door, business was sufficiently confident of its own power (the "imperialism of free trade") to carry forward the process of expansion largely on its own. Yet, the dynamism of early modern capitalism, realized in part through grinding methods of labor suppression, notably, the privatization of force, helped on by a compliant government, meant that within capitalism itself there was tremendous jockeying for power requiring the imposition of Order if major railroads and industrial firms were to enjoy their secure monopoly status.

Here government was crucial to harmonious internal structural arrangements, anticompetitive in its policies for the promotion of monopolism sector-by-sector including banking (the House of Morgan, whose offshoots firmed up the organization of railroads and manufacturing) as the means to systemic consolidation—an end to internecine competition—which was achieved in the early 20th century under Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson (themselves the Janus-faced construct of the Battleship Navy and supposed liberal internationalism) setting the stage for the



present era. In practice, we see the interpenetration of business and government as the integration of monopoly capitalism in its own right. Even the New Deal, because it provided a significant welfare-dimension as indispensable to the recovery of capitalism during the Great Depression, furthered the monopolistic trends through the National Recovery Administration. America was therefore poised on the threshold of world power, its initial phase of globalization made possible through a combination of wartime economic planning for the future, massive profits in the defense industries, and, immediately after, the acceleration and intensification of anticommunism partly as the cover for unilateralism in shaping the world system.

Why is the foregoing important for understanding the nature of American capitalism today? Is history a useful guide to the present and future? Business power cannot exist in a political and structural vacuum. This is no longer the 1890s or 1920s, when American capitalism displayed its wares and conducted its foreign investments pretty much as it chose. Wilson's attempt to destroy Bolshevism through the Siberian Intervention gave us a preview of what lay ahead, but business could continue its course still for two-plus decades without full-throttle military help in further expansion. By the late 1940s one can say that the military remained a junior partner of a synthesized ruling group or class, given the overwhelming thrust of business and its ascendant banking wing in defining American capitalism. But the world was changing, not only the rise of rival power centers, and an awakening proto-revolutionary Third World, but America itself was now succumbing to its own political hysterics over the real and imagined enemies it created and the social forces it summoned into being by its destructive conduct in global affairs.

American capitalism could no longer go it alone, the military increasingly supplying the muscle for continued expansion and profitability. Korea and Vietnam were important chapters in the reshaping of a capitalist polity, with numerous interventions beyond mention the underpinning for a coalescent framework of elites, all making for a structural process of shaking down to the bare essentials the capitalist and military components in search of equilibrium. For otherwise, America feared its decline and would do anything to prevent. Granted, it is hard to conceive of capitalism as a perpetual war machine, especially in America, which labors under the fiction of being, or if it ever was, then remaining, a democracy. But there it is, an arms budget dwarfing all else, military bases strategically gathered worldwide, death squads euphemistically termed Special Ops, presidential-directed drone assassinations, the list goes on—so much so that one almost forgets capitalism is centrally about business and profits, not murder and mayhem.

At this point, business, rather than the military, appears to be the junior partner of American capitalism, but for those who value symmetry as an aesthetic goal, it will be welcome news that business is seeking to make a comeback, to claim its autonomy as a worthy partner in the Great Capitalist Synthesis, an accomplice to the more successful militarization of capitalism by holding its own as an integral part in the relationship. In sum, the desideratum of business as usual, as in fleecing the consumer and jeopardizing his/her safety, destroying the environment, and best of all, removing itself from the constitutional foundations of the rule of law. Corporations and banks have become a law unto themselves, with all the organs of government stretching from the Executive, Congress, the Supreme Court, to myriad regulatory agencies some unbeknownst to the public, sitting as a chorus of admiring voices egging them on.

Business wants parity with its soul partner, the military, and to that end we see many straws in the wind, from the coddling of General Motors over the killing of its customers with a defective

ignition switch to the mining operations which release carbon emissions into the atmosphere, to, now the most recent revelation, a frightening judicially-supported move to abstract business from legal redress for any death and harm it inflicts or falsification of terms it imposes on those whom it putatively serves or comes into contact. The New York Times deserves high praise for documenting how business in what is becoming a unified posture is stripping away meaningful recourse to the law for the downright illegal and often sadistic practices it daily commits against the American people. (See my CounterPunch article, “Corporate Rescindment of Legal Rights: Business Power Run Amuck,” for some background.) Class-action law suits, frequently the only feasible action of the poor for seeking redress of grievances against the giant corporations, are all but prohibited, replaced in contracts by compulsory-arbitration clauses, intended in the first place to kill class actions, which compel the individual standing alone to face insurmountable odds in a process by which the corporation names the arbitrator, keeps the proceedings secret, and determines the rules of procedure.

Civil courts are thrown to the winds. It is as though capitalism, in this one seemingly minor area touching primarily the normalization of everyday relationships, has gone on the offensive, not of course to re-establish its relation to the military, but specifically and directly to exercise its domination over the people. I take this contractual bowdlerization to be symptomatic of things to come, capitalist arrogance to detach itself from the moral-legal norms of society and judicial framework to support them, and become, now fully militarized and feeling its oats, in sufficient commanding position to run roughshod over even the formalities of democracy. The now-and-future business polity is the fulfillment of the fascist dream, an authoritarian power structure of corporate consolidation supported through governmental suppression of dissent at home and an aggressively waged foreign policy to capture world markets. The small print of the contracts one signs, whether for car rentals or nursing homes, and thousands of transactions in between, emboldens capitalism to go its solipsistic way, to the destruction of freedom, the planet, and human dignity.

NOVEMBER 6, 2015

### **Politicized Judaism: The Eclipse of Spirituality**

This is not about the belief, or nonbelief, in God, a matter of conscience which is, or should be, the free choice of every individual; rather, it is about the vulgarization of religion itself when, on the believer side of the spectrum over this question, policies and actions in the name of religion have totalitarian/fascistic consequences altogether negating the moral-ethical-spiritual core of the belief system. This is what has happened, or is happening, to Judaism under the influence of an all but wholly uncritical allegiance to Israel, which in its actions and the preponderant will of its people offer a direct attack on the basis of Jewish faith. Ironically, a world religion that had been in the vanguard of tolerance, learning, and radicalism, and for that had suffered the worst possible punishment of genocidal mass extermination in the Holocaust, has become a bastion of global reaction which practices its mini-holocaust over the lives of the Palestinians.

World Jewry, including the United States, applauds or the very least is complicit in the moral destruction of Judaism, its spirituality (Latin, spiritualis, of breathing) that which defines the essence of conduct as well as belief to embrace higher principles of moral truth, is shattered on the

rocks of militarism, arrogance, obsessive hegemonic claims (all usually directed against the weak) characterizing the Israel of modern times. Every child beaten or murdered by settlers' anger and IDF forces in the demand for ironclad subordination of another people, spits in the face of Torah ... and insults the memory of the holocaust Victims. The pitiable sight of the way American Jews rally to Israel's side, instead of expressing shame of its human-rights record, and demanding a fundamental change of policy and moral direction, raises for me the question: Is there longer because of Israel's record of betraying Jewish humanism an existential foundation for faith? Is God DEAD?

These dark thoughts are prompted most recently by Netanyahu's appointment of Ran Baratz as his chief of public diplomacy, not that sufficient provocation hasn't existed for some decades on how Israel, fully militarized, nuclear armed, boastful of its might, has acted toward Palestinians and on the regional and global scene. Flaunt it, baby (or rather, Bibi), never look back, always a steely-eyed attitude shifting progressively rightward through time, contemptuous of the UN as well as world opinion, brazen in a disregard for the brutality of Occupation, self-righteous about the alleged necessity for exercising dominance (aka, ethnic cleansing) on a permanent footing, as when leading Israeli government officials openly declare their rejection of a Palestinian state. Yet beyond all this, there is the unrelieved hatred boiling up from the Israeli psyche and ethos, which is not explainable by a realistic assessment of context (Israel does not face annihilation!) but the twisted mindset, perhaps a form of self-hatred, borne of exercising domination itself. Sadly, the disease is infectious, affecting Jews everywhere. Simply, the Jewish people will not be free until Israel has been democratized, shorn of its societal poisons.

On Baratz, an instructive example, let me turn to an Associated Press article in the New York Times entitled, "Netanyahu Appointment Casts Cloud Over US Visit," (10-5), in which my first thought upon reading about Baratz is that it is a shame that religion is being used as a cover for societal persecution, and my second, that, yes, one case cannot be used to generalize about the whole, but still he is archetypal and, more important, fits into Netanyahu's political strategy and personal conviction about pushing the goal posts to make extremism ever more moderate-appearing and acceptable. Netanyahu may yet fire Baratz before meeting with Obama, or shortly after, but the purpose of the appointment has been served—flaunt it, baby, stick it to the world community that Fortress Israel is capable of defending itself against all comers, and for that reason can also act with impunity in doing whatever it chooses—even tweaking the nose of its patron, the United States.

We learn here that Baratz has made some inexpedient comments before Netanyahu's visit to Washington (singularly, the appointment was made only days before the trip, sending a signal of Israel's position which, though an apology followed, has all the earmarks of a planned insult). The account notes: "Netanyahu announced Baratz's appointment as his chief spokesman late Wednesday, and soon after, old Facebook posts had emerged in which Baratz suggested that Obama is anti-Semitic and Kerry cannot be taken seriously. He also derided Israel's popular president as 'marginal.'" Netanyahu claims ignorance of the posts, but his appointments hardly justify confidence: Ron Dermer as ambassador to Washington, Danny Danon as ambassador to the UN, one opposed to "the nuclear deal with Iran," the other "a strong supporter of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and an equally fervent opponent of a Palestinian state, putting him at odds with the international community." No, Baratz was no accident, stating Obama's response to Netanyahu's speech before Congress was an example of "modern anti-Semitism in liberal Western states," and

as for Kerry, “a stand-up comedian, insinuating his speeches are laughable.” He also went after Reuven Rivlin, Israel’s president, in cutting remarks.

Then, also in *The Times*, Jodi Rudoren’s earlier article, “Netanyahu Quiets Deputy Who Said She Dreamed of Israeli Flag Over Jerusalem Holy Site,” (9-27), provides further indication of a trend increasingly toward a hardened Right, in which all three, Baratz, Dermer, Danon, and now, Tzipi Hotovely, as deputy foreign minister (Netanyahu being his own foreign minister), are by intent provocative appointments to show the world Israel’s complete unconcern about global opinion. When she said recently, “‘It is my dream to see the Israeli flag’” flying over the Old City holy sites, once more one senses an orchestrated theme of defiance, Netanyahu’s calculated denial, and, with the upcoming meeting, in which Israel is asking for billions in military spending over the next ten years, a hubristic assertion of moral superiority at one with its policy of repression at home. (For what else the huge military outlays?) Rudoren points out that in Netanyahu’s assembled coalition, one “with the slimmest possible parliamentary majority and with many members who are to his right on the political spectrum,” he somehow emerges for that reason as a centrist figure, is of course nonsense. It also reveals how far down and popular semi-fascist values and beliefs have sunk into Israeli consciousness.

No sign yet that the resignation of Baratz and Hotovely has been demanded, and even if so this does not alter the broader picture, many others perfectly capable of stepping into their shoes. Netanyahu looks good when compared with those around him, in effect, a self-devouring Right that can do no wrong. I was struck by Gadi Wolfsfeld’s (a professor of communications at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya) observation: “‘He [Netanyahu] becomes the responsible adult—he is saying, I know you think I’m right wing, I know you think I’m radical, but these people are much worse. It [the argument] serves both sides. It serves Netanyahu’s side to tell the world that if you don’t depend on him, you have the other crazies coming in, and it serves the crazies, because when they say what they say, all their constituents stand up and applaud.’”

There are plenty of crazies to go around in Israel, even those claiming moderation meeting that standard. Hotovely, in “her opening speech to Foreign Ministry appointees suggested that they invoke the Talmud to buttress arguments for Israeli sovereignty over the occupied West Bank,” is a perfect illustration of zealotry run wild, as also when she told “European diplomats—who reported her comment to Washington—that the government would never evacuate West Bank settlements” part of the orchestration of the hardline message, designedly, I suggest, on the assumption that claims to power breed respect. Finally, let’s look again at Baratz’s statement, as reported in William Booth’s article in the *Washington Post*, “Netanyahu’s new top media adviser called Obama an anti-semitic, (10-5), slightly different from the quotation above, and more biting in tone: “‘Looks like a modern anti-Semitism [the Iranian nuclear negotiations] disguised as Western liberalism. It comes of course with lots of tolerance and understanding of Islamic anti-Semitism; so much tolerance and understanding that they are willing to give them the atom.’” It’s my way, or the highway (of death and destruction), Palestinians as perhaps a surrogate for Iranians, Iranians as a surrogate for—the chain of reasoning never stops, as the seething cauldron of hatred boils over.

NOVEMBER 10, 2015

### **Negating Structures of Repression: Sisyphus and Bartleby**

The power of negation here involves the individual's fight against the odds, a personal context of defiance in the face of unjust systems encased within seemingly insurmountable walls, even especially when the sources of constraint and dehumanization are not readily identifiable. The struggle is nonetheless made, as though a testimony to the valuing of human freedom. I have selected two reasonably well-known examples, one from mythology, the other, literature, to make my point. Namely, resistance to repressive systems is a categorical moral imperative, if conscience be our guide to life and the foundations of exploitation be attacked; and although consistency of application of principle requires that one oppose all totalitarian settings and regimes, my concern now is its relevance to capitalism and, more particularly, to America. For we live in a corporatist/authoritarian framework of governance, economy, and ideology which inculcates a habituation to wealth accorded to the presumptively deserving few, supported if necessary through a skewed legal order and the use of force, the remainder of society judged inferior and rightly deferential to their supposed betters, when possible a self-castration of the middle and lower classes through their own internalization of prevailing societal norms that are set from above.

Consumerism makes the accommodation painless, except when itself objectified as an appetite which can never be fully satisfied, or when the industrial-financial class dynamics prove to be exploitative as well as depression-prone, in which case consumerism is temporarily dethroned by the harshness of poverty, disease, apathy. For most, even then, it remains the aspirational trump card of capitalism, the seedbed of false consciousness germinated by the epistemology of capitalism's commodity structure. Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 is still our best guide to the societal formation of ALIENATION, the mind-numbing, dehumanizing historical process within which we find ourselves, and key to the commodity fetishism which tyrannizes over us and helps explain the lack of resistance to the institutions of repression.

If we abstract deceit as a salient element from the familiar mythopoeic characterization of Sisyphus (ascribed to him not only because of his treating in human affairs but also because of his challenge to the Greek gods), we have, in his ceaseless labor of rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, only to see it roll back of its own power to the bottom, an example of DEFIANCE and, I might add, courage in the face of adversity. Sisyphus is a fighter, a quester after, perhaps not knowledge, but rather identity and fulfillment. It is the act of struggle (as in Titian's painting), and the thoughts running through his head as the rock returns to the base, that is ennobling. Camus emphasizes the absurdity, the repetitive act of pushing the rock upward, only for it to fall back, as, even then, a salutary life-experience because what is absurd has been converted into a purposeful existence. Somewhere between Homer and Camus we discover the heroic dimensions of Sisyphus.

And so, if I insert capitalism into the picture, for many, ceaseless labor, and the cultural assault on reason to bludgeon the critical sensibility capable of penetrating institutions of repression as a necessary condition of its security and stability, we find a societal context in which prototypic Sisyphean resistance, however difficult to be achieved, must be continued—the alternative being a perpetual state of alienation combined with authoritarian rule. This, I submit, is the direction America has taken and already progressed quite far. Therefore, by necessity, we are all Sisyphus, accepting struggle as the path to freedom, pushing forward until the mountain top has been reached and backward societal motion ceases. (I am suddenly reminded of Dr. King's words about having

seen the Mountain, and I believe that like him the Promised Land is not to be equated with contemporary capitalism.)

Struggle, as with Sisyphus, unleashes mental energies otherwise lying dormant, a consciousness of societal transformation and individual conviction/commitment only possible under today's conditions of manipulation, surveillance, and a settled war-psychology, when Negation, both as the ability and willingness to say No to the existing structure of power and system of values, is resolutely maintained, in defeat, bloodied, yet rising up again and again, against the organized forces of wealth, power, militarism, together, at bottom, a compost of decaying Empire and its spirit of nihilism. At some point, democratic structure and practice will win out, if one accepts the Sisyphean paradigm of embarking on the quest in the first place and refusing legitimation to the mere affirmation of what exists. One must leap beyond Camus, activating the meaning of the absurd into a militant defiance wherein every meaningless, inhumane request and burden placed on the individual by society is met by a simple yet persistent and resounding NO!

Here Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" comes into view, its subtitle especially—Wall Street, not Main Street, or Elm Street, or the street Dick and Jane lived on, in my third grade reader—reveals the author's intent, the new archetypal figure of American capitalism surrounded by walls, hemmed in by walls, staring out of his nakedly bare room onto a blank wall, thrown back upon his own resources, tightly-coiled, ready to spring, also, like Sisyphus, storing up the energy to say No to the repression holding him back. We find in Bartleby that No=Defiance=Sought-for Liberation, in a societal context intended to mutilate the individual, destroy his/her will, reduced to a powerless cipher destined to remain in the cubicle which defines the life of alienation. Yet, Bartleby fights back, still in the only way he knows how, "I would prefer not to," in response to every dehumanizing request and/or order made to him: total non-complicity with the SYSTEM, in sum, a silence which is deafening, this deafening Silence, negation at its shrillest, capable of knocking down structures dependent on passive consent—acquiescence in the consumerist rite, even when long out of reach to those mired in poverty.

Those who doubt Melville did battle with alienation (Bartleby's story) or false consciousness in Moby Dick (the struggle of Ahab to assert his personhood) have not come to terms with his critical spirit and inceptive radicalism, *Pierre*, the novel, falling between Bartleby and Moby Dick from the standpoint of the vital and necessary search for transcendence in an awakening but increasingly false, confining, undemocratic America. Like Sisyphus, the failure of transcendence dooms the individual to the bottom of the mountain, crushed under the rock of capitalism, or perhaps worse, not crushed in body so much as spirit, yielding to the paralysis of will, opposite to the declaration of negation directed against all things repressive. By that I do not mean the repression-free polymorphous sexuality of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, a vision of liberation having little socioeconomic meaning and content, but Melville's vision of the disciplined pursuit of freedom, transcendence, the epistemological break with a purportedly American Innocence.

Sisyphus and Bartleby, alike, bode ill for the homogenization of American repression; they are rebels where rebellion is not wanted, is in fact a cardinal sin. In our own time, following them, we must say No to war, No to intervention, No to climate change, No to a fiercely unjust system of wealth distribution, No to racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, No, therefore, to an American exceptionalism which itself contains the positivism of hegemony, exploitation, repression, and other presumed truths of the human condition. Negation, on behalf of freedom, positivism, on behalf of

status-quo repression, Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" an emphatic affirmation of life through the negation of its unjust, inhumane consequences. His statement, in contrast to the narrator's (his employer's complacency), is not contrariness for its own sake, and instead, a principled opposition to the forces of alienation, hence, a manifesto of wholeness to be realized beyond the walls of Wall Street. Bartleby finds no salvation, only imprisonment, starvation, and death within the prison walls, an ending that perhaps awaits us all. But Bartleby, if I may, kept the faith, neither compromising his will nor conceding to the standards of conventional wisdom a moral legitimization which buttresses capitalism against alternative formations and dissenting opinions. Even our narrator glimpses tragedy, when he exclaims at the end, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!"

The fight must continue.

NOVEMBER 11, 2015

### **Obama-Netanyahu: Siamese Twins of Global Reaction**

Theatrical differences aside, the reputed bad chemistry between them, Obama and Netanyahu are two peas in a pod conjoined in ideology by a spirit of amoral cynicism in which unrestrained militarism, passing for diplomacy, seeks out to destroy Enemies of the State, i.e., whomever is in the way of a hubristic nationalism identified with Rightest social forces in domestic as well as international politics. When Emerson says an ocean is a large drop, a drop, a small ocean, he might be describing the US and Israel, one an enlargement of the other, the other the larger in microcosm—the same impulse toward ethnocentrism and xenophobia, the same haughtiness in facing outward, the same rejection of internal dissent, the same need to designate, brutalize, and find societal coherence and personal identity in doing so, a Victim. It is no wonder America hails Israel as its closest friend (who else, for that matter, would put up with US imperialism and claims to unilateral world dominance?), a sentiment fully reciprocated by Israel out of necessity because the community of nations increasingly views it as a pariah state. They are made for each other, a marriage—or so both believe—consummated in Heaven.

It was not always thus. To be sure, America had its share of developmental/incipient fascism since at least the 1890s because the corporate structure facilitated the high concentration of industrial and financial wealth accompanied by a ruthless and repressive labor policy, which by and large holds to this day. Yet there was always valiant opposition to the process of capitalist accumulation of wealth and power in ever fewer hands, social movements of labor rights and civil rights which provided a dimension of democratization otherwise absent from modern US history. Without social protest from society's disadvantaged, exploited, discriminated against, America might have become Germany, given the structural trends found in capitalism toward hierarchy and the Leadership Principle (here, business itself).

Likewise, Israel did not have to become what it is today, namely, a distorted, slightly watered down version of European authoritarianism placing it on the same political latitude as America. World Jewry, pre-1945, possessed a vision and record of humanism which all degree of radicals could proudly affirm and which had ramifying impacts on music, the arts, literature, always in forward motion seeking to transcend the status quo—an implicit antifascism which, had not Israel by 1947 already started to become intolerant, proscriptive, determined on sole mastery of the land, could have carried still further that vision of humanism in a new setting of harmony as exemplified

by some aspects of labor Zionism and the kibbutz movement. But it was not meant to be, for reasons I still do not understand. Ever since, Israel has been trending Right, a political pattern of ethnic cleansing (by whatever name one wishes to assign its oppression of the Palestinians—as though the Holocaust gave Israelis license to persecute another people in its stead).

There we are, its crunch time, another Obama-Netanyahu meeting, more theatrical foreplay, as meanwhile the wheels of counterrevolution grind on and military and intelligence communities cozy-up to one another in recognition of a perceived common interest. Which of the two, Israel or America, is dominant, which subordinate, is hard to say, so slavish is US policy to the dictates and will of Israel; that, too, is difficult to understand. Military aid is forthcoming; votes in the UN, the same. If this were merely relations between x and y, one would suspect blackmail was involved; since that is not the case, we are left with a puzzle—fear of being called anti-Semitic, no; intense lobbying by Jewish groups, hardly a full explanation; the role of evangelicals, ditto, leaving us perhaps with a common ideological residue of latent proto-fascism ascribable to the stage of capitalist development requiring militaristic foundations if it is to prosper and flourish.

I turn then to Peter Baker and Jodi Rudoren's New York Times article, "Obama and Netanyahu: A Story of Sights and Crossed Signals, (11-9), for background on their meeting. Again one must delve beneath the surface of personality-differences; warrior-types may disagree over boasting rights, but peel away the vanity and you have the same cunning, the same ruthlessness (as in the way Obama presides over hit-lists and drone assassinations, or Netanyahu, the IDF attacks on civilians, including children), the same coldness therefore in the face of human suffering for which they themselves are responsible. Baker and Rudoren, however, choose to emphasize not policy but personality, although even there much can be learned. They write that back in 2010 the day when Obama signed his health care legislation (big celebration) Netanyahu showed up at the White House and expected royal treatment: "He felt squeezed in, not accorded the rituals of such a visit. No photographers were invited in to record the moment. 'That wasn't a good way to treat me,' he complained to an American afterward." Netanyahu appears like a petulant child holding a grudge.

"The tortured relationship," they write, "between Barack and Bibi, as they call each other, has been a story of crossed signals, misunderstandings, slights perceived and real." Then came the "rupture over Mr. Obama's push for a nuclear agreement with Iran [which] led to the spectacle of Mr. Netanyahu denouncing the president's efforts before a joint meeting of Congress." One is peeved by the other's nerve, yet Iran per se hardly signifies they are "divided by ideology," as the reporters claim, given Obama's own belligerence toward Iran plus the fact that their current meeting is for discussing "a new security agreement and ways to counter Iran." From here, the account takes us to fairyland, for it makes light of Obama's war propensities and reactionary views of which on both counts he certainly can't fault Netanyahu: "Undergirding their personal disconnect are different world views. Mr. Obama sees Mr. Netanyahu as captured by a hard-line philosophy that blocks progress. Mr. Netanyahu considers Mr. Obama hopelessly naïve about one of the world's most volatile neighborhoods." If anything, now with Syria, Obama is up to his neck in adventurism in the region.

The love spat: Netanyahu "feels disrespected and misled by a president he thinks does not have Israel's best interests at heart," while Obama "feels aggrieved at being portrayed as anti-Israel even though he has provided extensive security aid and fought Palestinian efforts to seek recognition as a state at the United Nations." In fact, both can be seen in a poor light, in which unwarranted egotism



obscures their objective similarities, the poor light primarily because the policies, not their wounded pride when each tries to best the other, are themselves cruel and vindictive in their reliance on the forcible depersonalization of others. Collateral damage for one, the round-up, rubber bullets, and a knock on the door at midnight, for the other. Yes, there are differences, the freezing of settlements, yet that has not stopped Obama and the US from supplying Israel with arms, etc. Ongoing settlement activity may well be a defining issue, yet American complicity in this as in everything else suggests a timely fabrication of differences is a face-saving device, while nothing in the situation changes, in order for America to maintain its relations with the Saudis and others. The theme, “[w]ith the Iran deal finalized,” is, it’s time to move on. Did anyone doubt that? A reactionary mindset creates a unified bond of solidarity.

As for the meeting itself, coverage has been sparse, and no press conference has taken place. In The Times, Julie Hirschfeld Davis’s article, “Obama and Netanyahu Seek to Move Past Rift Over Iran Nuclear Deal,” (11-9), we find both on their best behavior as though carefully scripted puppets. Obama: “It’s no secret that the prime minister and I have had a strong disagreement on this narrow issue. But we don’t have a disagreement on the need to making sure Iran does not get a nuclear weapon, and we don’t have a disagreement about us blunting destabilizing activities in Iran that may be taking place. And so, we’re going to be looking to make sure we find common ground there.” The ominous words, “blunting destabilizing activities in Iran,” have the ring of regime change about them, but more, seeking “common ground” should dispel any doubts about an Israel-centric Middle East policy framework.

Netanyahu avoided mention of the nuclear accord, instead emphasizing that someday there may be a two-state solution: “I want to make it clear that we have not given up our hope for peace. And I remain committed to a vision of two states for two peoples, a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state.” A victor’s peace: occupy so much land as to make the other state a shrunken entity mired in subjugation, one demilitarized, the other with a full nuclear arsenal in addition to police powers and military readiness second to none—and even then, a grudging recognition at best. Significantly, Obama does not dispute the “vision,” however one-sided its practical implementation. He actualizes its unevenness because the main concern of the meeting is “the renewal of a 10-year package of United States military assistance to Israel.” Although the present agreement doesn’t expire until 2017, he “wanted to get a ‘head-start’ on renegotiating it.” We are speaking of a sum in the ball-park of \$50B in the time frame.

My New York Times Comment on the Baker-Rudoren article, same date, follows:

Neither leader nor their respective sides has clean hands. The US under Obama maintains a global military posture of war, intervention, regime change, drone assassination, etc., a record creating a framework where proposals of any kind must be viewed with suspicion. Israel has become the US in miniature when it comes to both domestic and foreign policy: belligerent, confrontational, xenophobic and ethnocentric.

Actually, like should attract like, both leaders and their nations in the vanguard of global unilateralism in their respective bailiwicks. But this hasn’t happened, whether because of personal chemistry fallout or the recognition of geopolitical differences. Iran is the touchstone for something deeper: hegemonic claims from which neither the US nor Israel can back down on. I believe we are heading for a midair collision, created not by objective

policy differences, but each's solipsistic dynamic of feeling it can act with impunity, an arrogance of power turned against the weak while simultaneously seeking to play an outsize role in world affairs.

Both Obama and Netanyahu should be urged to back down, learn a little humility, pursue a course of peace, for Israel, reconciliation with Palestinians, for America, an end to confrontation with Russia and China. That of course will not happen; if they could exploit their mutual hatreds and failings, perhaps they could then get along better. Meanwhile the world is tired of each.

NOVEMBER 13, 2015

### **Obama and Keystone XL: A Bastardized Legacy**

Obama's rejection of the pipeline extension for transmission of a portion of Alberta tar sands oil on November 6, already the subject of three solid critical articles in CounterPunch, reveals the political and ideological nihilism of his presidency and actions of his administration, an effort at legacy-building when all else has failed. How could it be otherwise, for who wants a legacy of being known as point-man of the American Corporate System (which he is!), obfuscation in the name of liberalism his signature method of operation, deep-seated impulses—even when not showing cause, as though wired into his make-up and belief system—toward war, intervention, regime change, and feelings of power through personal approval of drone assassination, covert action, persecution of whistleblowers, mass surveillance, an identification with the purposes of US global hegemony given practical meaning in the reliance on force and exultation of all things military? When one begins with that context, the archetypal capitalist front man, it is difficult to take seriously his rejection of this pipeline project as other than planned deceit to burnish his image, at the same time attempt to silence his environmentalist critics, and fend off opposition to further contamination of the atmosphere.

Obama's record on climate control (like so much else in the 2008 campaign, he made promises about taking strong action on the environment, yet did not introduce plans to use the EPA to limit greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants until mid-2014) is inseparable from his larger treatment of corporations, as in making the security and profitability of US business near-absolute under the provisions of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. There are no soft spots in his economic policy; the welfare of major industrial-financial enterprises is possibly second to, and even then interrelated with, militaristic expansion, itself less for its own sake than as the basis for market end investment penetration in an American defined and guided international political system. US multinationals of practically every description are fully intended to operate as vehicles of national power (privatization as the simulacrum of American Exceptionalism) and furnish impetus for the further tightening of the structure of advanced capitalism, in both cases complemented by a strong military underwriting the principle of globalization.

What has this to do with oil, natural gas, coal? Extraction, like consumerism, becomes a god-given right (and rite!) to the superior among individuals, corporations, nations, an instrumental approach to life and statecraft alike which reflects the amoral core of capitalism, the mindset of plunder and take no prisoners. Of course there is concern about energy independence on the level of policymaking, but that hardly explains the lies about the effects of fracking, methane, the turn in

strategy to ever more dangerous methods and sources of supply, all pointing to the rapid acceleration of factors promoting climate change. It is as though the nation under Obama intends the outcome, takes pride in self-deception, values denial as an expression of loyalty to capitalism, and ridicules science as faintly socialistic. Only the poor would suffer, marginalized already, and therefore not to be considered. Do I exaggerate? Let's go back to 1950, Theodor Adorno and colleagues, in *The Authoritarian Personality*, use the f-scale [fascism] to show the unitary character of the human personality structure, the interconnectivity of ideological views when it comes to attitudes toward the individual, society, and government.

Obama cannot obliterate fellow humans through drone assassination and pursue constructive policies on global warming. He cannot pretend to putting in place environmental safeguards when the entire infrastructure of delivery systems (with the lone exception) with the attendant risks ignored has now been constructed, even including ports for the export of oil. What is here lacking is a moral conviction that the affirmation of life requires social justice broadly conceived to apply to nature as well as persons, that respect for one, to be authentic, necessarily entails a respect for the other. By his leadership, fusing Wall Street and militarism, he proves incapable of addressing societal problems, for whether oil or natural gas, the emissions' floodgate is wide- open; pollution goes with consumerism as the genius of American life. Obama is content to go along with the tide, a legacy of spoliation and carnage perhaps altogether fitting for the role the US has set for itself in the world.

NOVEMBER 17, 2015

### **Matriarchal Fascism: Clinton, Embodiment of US Power**

The recent Democratic debate gave a hint of Clinton's pro-Wall Street ingrained posture, frightening because at its foundation is the fusion of militarism and capitalism, both at a heightened stage of development. The harpy of Cold War intervention and regime change, Clinton has used American foreign policy to maximize a US-defined and sponsored pattern of globalization, based on the encirclement, containment, and isolation of both Russia and China, in order to shape a hierarchical domestic structure of retrograde social and economic policies favoring elite financial and industrial groups now popularized as the 1% but in reality a far more complex system because of its militaristic/expansionist underpinnings. When and if fascism comes to America, if it has not already, it will be deceptively clothed: not hardened far right Republicanism, but respectable, seemingly reasonable Liberalism personified by the Clintons with Obama cultivating the intermediate ground.

Who needs Rubio, Cruz, Bush, etc. etc., when Clinton already possesses, better than they, the articulated paradigm of Wall Street, Pentagon, think tank planning and connections which has propelled America's counterrevolutionary role in global affairs, all internalized and ready for execution. I say "matriarchal," then, not to indicate gender per se, but in her concrete case, an overseeing, overarching figure, ready to take command of the full apparatus of power, the new head of the family, using the subterfuge of motherly caring for the disadvantaged and the poor to firm up and tighten a ruling class seeking political-ideological dominance at home and abroad while pursuing traditional imperialist goals of market penetration, a sustained supply of raw materials, the advantages of outsourcing through reliance on a global labor market, and the consequent retardation

of Third World modernization and autonomy. Bill Clinton is chimp change compared with what Mrs. Clinton can effectuate under the handle of counterterrorism and neoliberalism: a world open to American spoliation and rapine (including the acceleration of climate change).

Fascism? Yes, in any meaningful sense, beginning with continuing the Obama policies of mass surveillance, indictment of whistleblowers, the use of federal regulatory agencies to protect the interests ostensibly to be regulated, then moving to the principal structural criterion of fascism borne out by Germany, Italy, and Japan (see Barrington Moore's chapter, "Asian Fascism," in his monumental *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*): the interpenetration of business and government, an integration of political structure which, even in the absence of the military component, fosters unimpeded capitalist development under the auspices of the State. This winning combination ensures the quelling of dissent over industrial and financial practices and power, habituates the populace to consumerism and patriotism, and employs State worship to cover over capitalistic excesses including the degradation of the environment. Add to the foregoing the undoubted place of the military as a synthesizing force in the political economy and carrying out its objectives, and, indeed, fascism is not a species of name-calling but an accurate description of impending reality.

One cannot but feel that Clinton is the quintessential expression of American tendencies from the late-19th century to the present, from Mahan's free-trade imperialism effected through the battleship navy, to TR's buttressing of corporatism via support for the House of Morgan (along with a severe attitude toward dissent and radicalism), to Wilson's internationalism as preview to the comprehensive framework of globalization (as symbolized in the Siberian Intervention and assumptions underlying the League of Nations), to Harding-Coolidge-Hoover straightout favoritism toward American business at home and abroad (which Clinton conveniently tucks away from view), to the mixed legacy of the New Deal, where authentic reform directed to the social welfare of the bottom-half in the throes of the Depression is partly counterbalanced by the National Recovery Administration's active fostering of monopoly power and wealth concentration, to the postwar period until the present, an unrelieved landscape of business growth harnessed to market expansion and military intervention, all—except for New Deal welfare measures—feeding into Clinton's assertive brand of militarized capitalism, a process sufficiently far along as to establish boundaries, political, ideological, economic, difficult to navigate through, much less counter and ultimately transcend, unless and until what we term the political class overthrows haute-capitalist influence and rejects America's hegemonic goals.

Surprisingly, the New York Times's editorial, "Hillary Clinton Botches Wall Street Questions," (Nov. 16), raises critical points on her debate performance which cast doubt on her suitability to be president. All will soon be forgiven, but this minor outburst perhaps signals wider concern in the electorate over the state of the economy and America's global position of intervention. The editorial in fact approves of her foreign policy credentials, the blip on Wall Street unfortunately a diversion: "Friday's terrorist attacks in Paris dominated [the debate] at first, allowing her to highlight her superior experience in world affairs. But it was those attacks that made her badly muffed response to questions about her fealty to Wall Street all the more jarring." It quotes the exchange between Sanders and Clinton, in which Sanders says, in substance, that Wall Street contributions to Clinton's campaign ("They expect to get something. Everybody knows that") will influence her

policies, to which she replied, with injured pride, to the moderator, “Wait a minute, he has basically used his answer to impugn my integrity.”

To its credit, The Times is not blind-sided. When Clinton went on to explain, “So, I represented New York, and I represented New York on 9/11 when we were attacked. Where were we attacked? We were attacked in downtown Manhattan where Wall Street is. I did spend a whole lot of time and effort helping them to rebuild. That was good for New York. It was good for the economy and it was a way to rebuke the terrorists who attacked our country,” The Times acidly observed: “Predictably, Twitter exploded with demands to know what campaign donations from big banks had to do with New York’s recovery from 9/11. Answer: little or nothing.” Rising further to the occasion, the editorial (perhaps unintentionally recalling the earlier slogan, What’s good for GM, is good for the country) lashed out:

Since 2001, she and Bill Clinton have earned more than \$125 million for speeches, many of the most lucrative made before financial groups. That does not account for the millions given directly to her campaign, and to political action committees backing her. Nearly 15 years after the 2001 attacks, Mrs. Clinton was earning more than \$200,000 for a 20-minute speech. Most of those took place behind guarded doors. But one can guess that she and the financial executives were not still talking about 9/11.

A superb indictment (the guarded doors calling to mind Clinton’s contempt for transparency, as in her evasion about her private email accounts at State) of opportunism, personal enrichment, an above-the-law mental set that manifestly touches on issues of responsibility and integrity.

It gets even better, as though The Times suddenly had pangs of conscience: “Middle-class Americans associate Wall Street with the 2008 meltdown of the economy that cost so many their homes and savings. In the debate Mrs. Clinton repeatedly referred to her plan for reining in banks, but offered few specifics. This is what happens when Hillary Clinton the candidate gets complacent.” However, it’s not clear whether the criticism is directed to her complacency or to the substance of her argument. (At least Sanders wants the restoration of Glass-Steagall, the separation of investment and commercial banking, which she pooh-poohed as inadequate without offering an alternative.) The editorial continues, “Her effort to tug on Americans’ heartstrings instead of explaining her Wall Street ties—on a day that the scars of 9/11 were exposed anew [the Paris attacks]—was at best botched rhetoric. At worst it was the type of cynical move that Mrs. Clinton would have condemned in Republicans.” Yet all is not lost, The Times finding the situation perfectly salvageable: “She should make a fast, thorough effort to explain herself by providing a detailed plan for how she would promote measures protecting middle-class Americans from another financial crisis.”

My New York Times Comment on the editorial, same date, follows:

...the type of cynical moves” says it all. The Times is to be congratulated for its frankness. No doubt it still will endorse Clinton, which is doubly unfortunate knowing how much she and Bill are sponging off Wall Street and leading the sophisticated charge for upper-groups’ aggrandizement. Throughout her career she has presented herself as moderately Left while pursuing an agenda favorable to existing wealth and power. Add to that an extreme hawkish foreign policy, which she has amply demonstrated, and one finds her at bottom not distinguishable from her more vociferous Republican rivals. 2016 will be a sad time in US

history, both major parties locked in a consensus on war, intervention, and regime change. (This does not make Sanders any the more appealing, for his foreign policy is equally interventionist and warlike.)

NOVEMBER 20, 2015

### **Obama, Interventionist: Study of a War Criminal**

War criminals are not born, they are made, or rather make themselves through the experience of having an inner motif of self-promotion directed to cultivating, and thus bringing themselves to the attention of, those possessing wealth and power. No subtlety here, no shame of wanting recognition; instead, merely an active fantasy life of grand leadership as a presumed visionary entitled to inordinate deference and respect. Merited achievement is irrelevant and beside the point, for what matters is to ride the wave of organized power, command at one's fingertips, an institutionalized militarism inseparable from the person himself/herself. Such presence, if it is to convince others, requires serial acts of violence sanctioned by law and government: *Le State, c'est moi*, i.e., once one has arrived, one then becomes the titular head (titular because serving to front a hierarchical system) of an elitist framework composed of the financial, industrial, and military communities, an integrated system disconnected from, while manipulating, the people to ensure social discipline at home and market expansion, via the threat and/or use of force, abroad. This describes the criminalization of historical development and public policy, or to be exact, the context and mental-set of the war criminal, for war is a useful tool for engineering conformity, promoting deference and submission to ruling groups, and diverting attention from social problems at home, and criminal, because the Leader is obsessed with maintaining order and identifying enemies of the State, in this case, primarily the business system as the directing force of State and society alike. Expand or deliquesce, dissolve in a puddle of weakness. This requires placing advanced capitalism on a sustainable basis, militarism becoming the midwife of profitability and expansion.

Sound familiar? It should. We've had decades of it in America, Obama being the latest in a line of specifically fascist-inclined leaders-administrations-Congresses beginning with Reagan, those coming before, especially Kennedy, reaching toward that destination yet not quite crossing the threshold. Before 1960, anticommunism/McCarthyism had already eroded the foundations of civil liberties, democratic government, peace as the approach to international politics, so that with Obama we not surprisingly see the archetypal servitor of a militarized plutocracy familiar in the annals of demagoguery now made presentable, however, as off-beat hip-fascism in the form of more casual deeds of violence, as in drone assassination. The apparatus of the State is kept seemingly in the background to conduct, before and still today (if not more than ever), its course of intervention, regime change, covert action, death squads whether in mufti or uniform as normal procedure in facing out into the world. How Kennedy would have admired Obama's achievements, both sharing a sangfroid which served to popularize an ethos of combativeness, supported by the steady drumbeat of the MSM, that extended well beyond what was dreamed of in the 1960s: then, Russia primarily if not exclusively in the crosshairs, now China perceived as the more consequential adversary, Obama leapfrogging his predecessors including Kennedy in broadening the battleground of confrontation.

This brings us to Syria, perhaps a blip on the radar screen of US global hegemonic thirst, still though instructive and illustrative of the larger picture, a globalization of American-sponsored counterrevolution, in which surgically picking out strategic areas that create an atmosphere of showdown has the desired effect of validating America's Great Power Status. Russia and China will do, but first, clear out the political-ideological debris which then places maximum pressure on the projected enemies—the Middle East an obvious cauldron of mayhem capable of being steered, under proper guidance, into a wider conflict as conceived by the politically criminal mind. To wit: Obama has charged Assad with the genocide of his own people, the use of sarin gas on a civilian population, an utterly despicable act justifying humanitarian intervention by the US, which happens also to deal a blow to Assad's chief allies, Russia and Iran. If nothing else, and there is more, as in, once wiping out Assad, running pipe lines for oil and natural gas through Syria and thereby blocking Russia's exports to the European market, the pretext for intervening in Syria strengthens US ties with Saudi Arabia and Israel (both, for different reasons, fearful of Assad's secularism, and silently cooperating among themselves) and makes of Syria itself the fulcrum for a geopolitical strategy having the potential for inaugurating World War III.

Only, what if Assad did not use sarin gas on his people and the evidence is now being shown to have been shaky, contrived, a false flag operation to offer that very pretext for regime change? When one's amoral cynicism allows for drone assassination, massive surveillance, black holes, as in Obama's signature usage, anything quite frankly is possible, and one believes him with the same degree of confidence one does a snake-oil salesman at carnival time. Here I lay out some evidence and analysis that suggest the preordained conventional wisdom of officials, starting with Obama, designed to disguise America's aggressive intent, is at best questionable and more likely deceitful. For an overview, I turn first to Eric Zuesse's Strategic Culture Foundation article, "Seymour Hersh's News Report Banned in U.S., is Finally Confirmed in Turkey," (Oct. 30), which is a significant defense of Hersh (for my generation, a very fine investigative journalist) who in the London Review of Books exploded the Obama rationale for intervention and regime change in Syria. We will look at Hersh's article after, but context is important, primarily the informal censorship of views which contradict the US position.

Zuesse quotes liberally from Hersh, which we can safely pass over until we come to Hersh, but he points out that the attack on Ghouta, Syria, August 21, 2013, had a strong Turkish-Saudi-US footprint, as revealed October 21 of that year by a Turkish parliamentary committee report and published the same day in Turkey's leading newspaper, Zaman, the object being, as brought out by the opposition party, a concerted effort by Prime Minister Erdogan to overthrow Assad via a false flag attack that would give Obama "a publicly believable excuse for invading Syria and doing what Erdogan wanted done." (Zuesse) The US Joint Chiefs of Staff were in on this, until evidence showed that, through British intelligence, the sarin gas used did not come from the Syrian stockpile, at which point the Chiefs urged caution. Obama, fearing exposure, did not get to bomb Syria to smithereens. CRP, the opposition party in Turkey, charged the government misled the public, deputy Seker stating, "The purpose [of the lie] was to create the perception that 'Assad killed his people with sarin and that requires a US military intervention in Syria,'" the official line that Russia supplied the sarin adding flame to the fire because Russia "is a country that both Erdogan and Obama want to defeat." Secker added, as quoted in Zaman, that "all of the files and evidence from the investigation show a war crime was committed within the borders of the Turkish Republic." In his words, "The investigation clearly indicates that those people who smuggled the chemicals

required to procure sarin faced no difficulties, proving that Turkish intelligence was aware of their activities. While these people had to be in prison for their illegal acts, not a single person is in jail. Former prime ministers and the interior minister should be held accountable for their negligence in the incident.”

Ban Ki Moon in late August launched an inquiry into the attack, and Hersh jumped into the fray, seeing the collaboration of Turkey and Syrian rebel groups (for which the US provided aid) as “trying to provoke a US intervention in Syria in order to bring down the Assad regime.” Zuesse also summarizes an article by Christof Lehmann, to whom we turn next, for extensive coverage of the false flag operation, in which Obama, the Joint Chiefs, and the CIA are involved, “the anti-Russian forces (headed by Obama),” according to Zuesse, “[being] behind it,” joined by Prince Bandar and the Saudi Interior Ministry. Zuesse concludes, “All of the evidence indicates that U.S. President Obama and Turkey’s President Erdogan were working together to create a case for America to bomb Syria until Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad would be gone, so that Assad’s government [his secularism, mine] could then be replaced by a Sunni Islamist regime (like Erdogan wants), which would be hostile to Russia and which would thus enable in Syria the construction of pipelines so that gas from U.S.-allied Sunni Qatar and oil from U.S.-allied Sunni Saudi Arabia might take the place of Russia’s oil and gas in the world’s biggest energy market: Europe. It’s a joint operation both of the U.S. aristocracy, and the Sunni Arabic royal families, basically a U.S.-Wahhabist operation.” Some of the “extra billions” being raked in, “would then fund yet more Sunni jihadists and clerics, to spread the Wahhabist Sunni faith yet further and thus satisfy the Sunni clerics and not only the national Sunni aristocracy; but, to Obama, this would mainly be just another way TO CRIPPLE THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY (emphasis, mine), to bring it down, which America’s aristocrats want to do.” The cherry on top of the whipped cream: “Syria’s overthrow would be a fitting sequel to Obama’s February 2014 overthrow of Ukraine’s President Viktor Yanukovich, who, like Bashar al-Assad, refused to cooperate with U.S. plans to force Russia’s President Vladimir Putin out of office.”

Further background for this Syrian coup d’etat can be found in Lehmann’s nsnbc publication, “Top US and Saudi Officials responsible for Chemical Weapons in Syria,” (Oct. 7, 2013), which emphasizes the US-Saudi connection as responsible for the gas attack (Turkey isn’t mentioned) employing rebel brigades under Bandar’s direction affiliated with al Qaeda, especially Liwa-al-Islam and Jabhat al-Nusrah, and the pivotal figure Zahran Alloush, who among other things is a chemical weapons expert. (As happened in Afghanistan, when the US supported the Taliban on the ground that it opposed the Soviet attempt to restore the Kabul government, America has a history of creating allies who turn around and become enemies. It is as though America needs here al Qaeda and/or ISIS affiliates to legitimize its own counterterrorism role as leading to the full-blown global counterrevolutionary posture, a humongous arms budget, and social control at home. To flirt with, actually supply money and arms to, jihadists we condemn at every turn, smacks of opportunism, hypocrisy, and a lot worse, as in capitalism’s dependence for survival on what amounts to a war economy at the expense of meeting pressing domestic needs.) The timing of the sarin attack coincides with, if not directly responds to, the Syrian army’s successful campaign to push back the insurgents, 25,000 strong, at the Jobar Entrance, the gateway both to an attack on central Damascus and the route for receiving US and Saudi arms from Jordan.



Assad was winning the Civil War, despite Obama and the MSM's depiction of a weak yet brave opposition fighting for freedom! 25,000 ain't hay, particularly when supplied with advanced weaponry (e.g., Konkurs anti-tank missiles) and trained by US Special Forces, occurring from the jumping off place of Al-Mafraq, the border town in Jordan. Principal action is occurring right at the time of the gas attack, August 20-21: "The [Syrian Arab Army] breakthrough resulted in a collapse of the jihadists defensive positions [near the Jobar Entrance] and to a crushing and decisive strategic defeat of the Jabhat al-Nusrah led brigades." Jobar, as "the sole remaining logistical supply route," was a major loss, cutting off the insurgents from al-Mafraq, where US Intelligence Services also operated, and "frustrated any hope for a successful, large-scale, CIA-US Special Forces-led military campaign against Damascus." It interrupted the road "used for weapons and troop transports from the Israeli occupied Syrian Golan, where Israeli Intelligence and the insurgents, according to an Austrian UNDOF officer, maintain a joint operations room."

We already see ample reason for a false flag operation; the campaign against Assad is going poorly, making American intervention—on humanitarian grounds—all the more imperative. Lehmann observes: "The collapse of the insurgent front prompted the front commanders, most of which worked in liaison to U.S. Special Forces, to deploy an elite force that should prevent the Syrian Army, at all costs, from gaining access to the Jobar Entrance, and from gaining control over the Jobar area. The majority of the insurgent crack forces came from Liwa-al-Islam with some additional troops from Jabhat al-Nusrah." He explains further: "The commanding officer of the elite forces was a Saudi national," Abu Abdul-Moneim, who "had established a cache of weapons, some of which had a tube-like structure, and others which looked like big gas bottles." They were stored in a tunnel in Ghouta (scene of the attack, and an eastern district of Damascus), the tunnel and cache brought to world media attention because Abdul-Moneim's son and "12 other fighters lost their lives there, because they mishandled improvised chemical weapons caused a leak in one of them." (This tells us the chemical weapons were highly toxic, as in sarin—NP)

Zahran Alloush enters now as the one who delivered chemical weapons to Damascus which were "most likely from al-Qaeda's (ISIL) chemical weapons stockpiles in Iraq." Mohammad Javed Zarif, Iran's Foreign Minister, warned Washington in early September (through the Swiss Embassy in Tehran), it turns out repeatedly, that "handmade articles for chemical weapons, including Sarin gas, were being transferred to Syria. The White House failed to respond." Here holding the Jobar Entrance "at any cost" if the military assault on Damascus was to succeed led to the decision by insurgent commanders "to launch a chemical weapons attack to halt the advance of the Syrian Arab Army." This decision had already been in the works by "the political and military opposition and core members of the international alliance" for some time, to take effect in August-September. The use of these weapons, it was thought, "should justify renewed calls for a military intervention. Lehmann summarizes to this point: "The decision to launch the chemical weapon on 21 August was most likely based on two considerations. That the use of chemical weapons was already planned. That the Jobar Entrance should be defended at all costs. The final decision, made by Zahran Alloush, may in fact have been predetermined together with his U.S.-Saudi liaison officers."

Let's be frank; the evidence remains circumstantial. Yet I find it persuasive. As Lehmann notes, "Launching a chemical weapons attack would allow the USA, UK and France, to call for military strikes against Syria and to turn the tide." Moreover, "Russian and Syrian intelligence sources described the weapons which were used to attack as rockets which were altered so as to carry

chemicals, launched by Liwa-al-Islam. The projectiles were most likely fired from a flatbed.” (The account shows the image of a truck which, after firing a single rocket, was covered up, a modified truck, “designed for launching a single rocket at a painfully slow rate of fire—not for tactical purposes.” It was, “literally, the perfect vehicle for a false-flag attack” like the one on Ghouta.) More basic, “one merely has to answer the fundamental question ‘Who benefits,’ and the answer is definitely not ‘the Syrian government.’” He further points out that the BND, the Federal German Intelligence Service, intercepted phone calls between Syrian officers and the High Command, and was convinced “none of the Syrian forces have used a chemical weapon.” In commonsense terms, which should count for something, he states: “Leaving alone any moral considerations, the domestic and international repercussions were foreseeable and there would not have been any strategic benefit for the Syrian Army or the government.”

Remember, Zahran Alloush was the supreme leader of Liwa-al-Islam, commanded its chemical weapons specialists, worked since the 1980s with “then Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Turki al-Faisal in both Afghanistan and Yemen,” and in the ‘90s “was involved in the Salafist-Wahabbist terrorist networks in Syria which led to his arrest by Syrian intelligence.” He was released in 2011 under Assad’s general amnesty (big mistake—mine) and immediately began receiving funds and weapons from Saudi intelligence, “which enabled him to establish Liwa-al-Islam as a de facto Saudi Arabia sponsored mercenary brigade under the auspices of the Saudi Interior Ministry.” The Ministry also deployed other al-Qaeda brigades in Syria, including the Omar Brigade, which “specialized in high level assassinations and large scale bombings.” Liwa-al-Islam, through Saudi funding, “gained fame due to risky, high-profile attacks, as in a 2012 bombing of Syria’s National Security Council in Damascus’s Rawda Square,” and assassinations of “several high profile members of Syria’s security establishment.” If this group traces back to Prince Bandar, as it does, that suggests a close connection with Washington.

Circumstantial, yes, but Assad’s engaging in sarin attacks on the Syrian people appears more dubious by the hour. A final point: Just weeks before the attack Bandar went to Moscow to meet with Putin, his purpose, to enlist Russia’s support for the removal of Assad. He cajoled, to no effect, then threatened, hinting to Putin that, a political settlement not forthcoming, there is no choice but military intervention. For Lehmann, “The minutes of the meeting clearly suggest Bandar’s direct involvement with regards to political responsibility [for the sarin attack], and Bandar also implies political responsibility of top-U.S. Officials.” They met on August 2; “Bandar tried to bribe Putin with weapons and oil deals in order to gain the Russian President’s support for ousting the Assad government,” to be replaced “with the Saudi-backed and sponsored opposition.” If Russia supported regime change, Bandar promised to reign in Chechen terrorists and protect the Sochi Winter Olympics. Otherwise, the veiled threat. “Putin responded by saying that the Russians know that the Saudis have supported Chechen terrorist groups for a decade, and the support which Bandar just had offered was utterly incompatible with the common objectives of fighting global terrorism.” Bandar was adamant that Assad must go, while Putin “stressed that the Russian position is that the Syrian people are best to speak for themselves, rather than those liver eaters” [the reference to an al-Qaeda leader “who had cannibalized the liver of a slain Syrian soldier”].

Bandar threatened once more: should the dispute over the future of Syria continue, “there is no escape from the (U.S.-led) military option, because the political stalemate would leave the military option as the only available choice to end the stalemate”—this, three weeks before the chemical

attacks. Bandar's statement, Lehmann writes, "strongly suggests foreknowledge, and given the close relations between Bandar and the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, John Brennan, one must imply that top-level White House executives, including President Obama[,] have been briefed and have the same foreknowledge." In Moscow, Bandar said "his message had been coordinated with the highest authorities in the Obama administration": "I have spoken with the Americans before the visit, and they pledged to commit to any understandings that we may reach, especially if we agree on the approach to the Syria issue." By coincidence, Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visits Jordan in mid-August "against the backdrop of major weapons deliveries to the Syrian opposition," this when a month earlier he said to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the administration "is preparing various scenarios for a possible U.S. Military intervention in Syria, and considering whether the USA should use 'the brute [force] of the U.S. Military, and kinetic strikes.'" On August 17, insurgents suffer a major defeat. Four days later, sarin-laden rockets hit Ghouta. The Bandar-Dempsey missions imply a full-court press, the International Criminal Court to this day unwilling to tackle the case. Circumstantial? Our man in the White House would be a prime candidate, along with Bandar and others, for investigation.

I have not forgotten Seymour Hersh—nor should David Remnick (he of impeccable anti-Russian credentials) and the New Yorker staff. His London Review of Books (we marginalize our best critics) article, "The Red Line and the Rat Line: Seymour M. Hersh on Obama, Erdogan, and the Syrian Rebels," (April 17, 2014), while discounting any involvement by Assad in the sarin attack (he does not even dignify the charge by discussing it), shifts the focus of responsibility for it to Erdogan and Turkey, Obama and Washington, along with Saudi Arabia and Bandar, complicit in the planning and execution, all for the purpose of affording the US justification for intervention, each of the participants having their own reasons. If one were to say that Obama had rushed to judgment about Assad the perpetrator of the sarin attack, that would be too charitable; Obama had preconceived ideas to push, knowingly lying to the American and world public by distorting the facts accordingly. We see in this account that inconceivable as it may sound the Joint Chiefs were to the Left of Obama, rejecting claims of Assad's involvement and urging caution on the president about making charges and also planning large-scale bombing immediately afterward.

Hersh goes back to Obama's 2011 Libyan intervention, in which he did not consult Congress, and by contrast, he changed course on Syria, alleging Assad's role in Ghouta and stating "he was ready to launch an air strike" to punish Syria for "crossing the 'red line' he had set in 2012 on the use of chemical weapons," yet failed to follow through. Hersh asks, Why? Two days before the air strike, Obama "announced that he would seek congressional approval for the intervention," and, in contrast to Libya, postponed then called it off when Assad, under Russian brokering of a deal, agreed to dismantle the stock of chemical weapons. The reason for the change: administration people wanting the red line enforced, and "military leaders who thought that going to war was both unjustified and potentially disastrous," a clash of views prompted by the report of Porton Down, Britain's defense laboratory, which had "obtained a sample of the sarin used in the 21 August attack and analysis demonstrated that the gas used didn't match the batches known to exist in the Syrian army's chemical weapons arsenal." That is an important finding, exonerative for Assad, damning for Obama, who maintained Assad's culpability and wanted to bomb Syria into hell.

It does not speak well for Obama that he is to the Right of his military, which buttresses my idea of his war criminality, as can be gleaned from this mildly stated passage: "The message that the

case against Syria wouldn't hold up was quickly relayed to the US joint chiefs of staff. The British report heightened doubts inside the Pentagon; the joint chiefs were already preparing to warn Obama that his plans for a far-reaching bomb and missile attack on Syria's infrastructure could lead to a wider war in the Middle East. As a consequence the American officers delivered a last-minute caution to the president, which, in their view, eventually led to his cancelling the attack." Absent the warning, he would have been back to business as usual, collateral damage his middle name and creating oppositional forces—which he is still doing, along with collateral damage—to foster regime change. The Middle East setting, in its incomprehensible network of alliances (our ally and NATO member, Erdogan was supporting the al-Nusra Front, jihadist to the core), provided both the opportunity for causing mischief and falling on our faces when the plans for intervention failed to work out. "For months," Hersh writes, "there had been some acute concern among senior military leaders and the intelligence community about the role in the war of Syria's neighbors, especially Turkey." As one former intelligence official told him, apropos of Turkey's intent to involve American power in the civil war, "We knew there were some in the Turkish government who believed they could get Assad's nuts in a vice by dabbling with a sarin attack inside Syria—and forcing Obama to make good on his red line threat."

Indeed, the manufacture of sarin gas seemed to define the aspirations of these insurgent (al-Qaeda) groups: "The joint chiefs also knew that the Obama administration's public claims that only the Syrian army had access to sarin were wrong. The American and British intelligence communities had been aware since the spring of 2013 that some rebel units in Syria were developing chemical weapons. On 20 June analysts for the US Defense Intelligence Agency issued a highly classified five-page 'talking points' briefing for the DIA's deputy director, David Shedd, which stated that al-Nusra maintained a sarin production cell." The report itself went on, in proper jargonese: "Previous IC focus had been almost entirely on Syrian CW stockpiles; now we see ANF attempting to make its own CW.... Al-Nusrah Front's relative freedom of operation within Syria leads us to assess the group's CW aspirations will be difficult to disrupt in the future." And then, drawing on multiple classified reports, it said: "Turkey and Saudi-based chemical facilitators were attempting to obtain sarin precursors in bulk, tens of kilograms, likely for the anticipated large scale production effort in Syria." The more evidence from the horse's mouth, the less credible Obama's charge of Assad's poisoning his people.

When members of al-Nusra were arrested in Turkey for possessing "two kilograms of sarin," they were quickly released (in addition, they were "accused of attempting to purchase fuses, piping for the construction of mortars, and chemical precursors for sarin") to the consternation of some Turkish papers, which have "been rife with speculation that the Erdogan administration has been covering up the extent of its involvement with the rebels." The DIA classified paper described how one al-Nusra member, working at a Turkish firm, provided "price quotes for bulk quantities of sarin precursors." In fact, the rebels mounted a series of chemical weapon attacks in March-April 2013 which was investigated by a special UN mission to Syria. It found in one village, Khan Al-Assal, that "at least 19 civilians and one Syrian soldier were among the fatalities." But the UN would not assign responsibility for the attack, stating in its report, "Investigators interviewed the people who were there, including the doctors who treated the victims. It was clear that the rebels used the gas. It did not come out in public because no one wanted to know."

The DIA also circulated a daily classified report called SYRUP which dealt with the Syrian conflict (including intelligence on chemical weapons) that soon Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff, abruptly curtailed. Hersh notes, “The decision to restrict distribution was made as the joint chiefs ordered intensive contingency planning for a possible ground invasion of Syria,” and as much internal discussion went on about Obama’s red line: “The joint chiefs asked the White House, ‘What does red line mean? How does that translate into military orders? Troops on the ground? Massive strike? Limited strike?’ They tasked military intelligence to study how we could carry out the threat. They learned nothing more about the president’s reasoning.” The secretiveness is characteristic of his style, and one can assume the worst from his silence. Not unrelated to this, Hersh continues (war criminality still before us): “In the aftermath of the 21 August attack Obama ordered the Pentagon to draw up targets for bombing. Early in the process, the former intelligence official said, “the White house rejected 35 target sets provided by the joint chiefs of staff as being insufficiently ‘painful’ to the Assad regime. The original targets included only military sites and nothing by way of civilian infrastructure. Under White House pressure, the US attack plan evolved into ‘a monster strike’: two wings of B-52 bombers were shifted to airbases close to Syria, and navy submarines and ships equipped with Tomahawk missiles were deployed. ‘Every day the target list was getting longer.’”

The itemization of death—two-thousand pound bombs, stand-by search-and-rescue teams—is altogether fitting, given Obama’s hit-list, his movement of military “assets” to the Pacific as a warning to China, his closeness to both the military and intelligence communities, so that his personal interest in destroying Assad, just as he would like, Putin and Xi, makes perfect sense. Hersh: “At this stage, Obama’s premise—that only the Syrian army was capable of deploying sarin—was unravelling,” the Porton Down material based on chemical samples from Ghouta pulling the rug from under him (though not given wide public currency). The British message to the joint staff was, “‘We’re being set up here,’” referring to the way the rebel forces claimed Assad had used sarin, and “the press and White House jumped at it. Since it now was sarin, ‘It had to be Assad.’” Curiously it was Dempsey, chairman of the joint chiefs, who was skeptical of Assad’s guilt, and who warned Congress that summer “of the danger of American military involvement in Syria, telling Senate Armed Services “‘there’s a risk that this conflict has become stalemated.’” Even Obama’s decision to go to Congress for approval of the Syrian campaign was pure Machiavellian: Like the Iraq experience, “if the current Congress were to vote to endorse the strike, the White House could again have it both ways—wallop Syria with a massive attack and validate the president’s red line commitment, while also being able to share the blame with Congress if it came out that the Syrian military wasn’t behind the attack.”

The bombing campaign was scratched, but its rationale still governed Washington thinking: “Although the strike plans were shelved, the administration didn’t change its public assessment of the justification for going to war.” We can now move from red line to, as in the subtitle, rat line which, shades of Iran-Contra, meant a switch in tactics: “The full extent of US co-operation with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in assisting the rebel opposition in Syria has yet to come to light. The Obama administration has never publicly admitted its role in creating what the CIA calls ‘a rat line,’ a back channel highway into Syria.” Here weapons were funneled “from Libya via southern Turkey and across the Syrian border to the opposition.” Many who received them were jihadists, “some of them affiliated with al-Qaeda.” The remainder of the article takes up the role of Turkey, even touching on Benghazi, where arms shipments from Libya began, with Erdogan using the

political liaison with the rebels as a bargaining chip to get America to play a more active role in Syria. Erdogan met with Obama in Washington, insisting that Assad had crossed the red line, and like Bandar with Putin, intimating that Turkey would take its own action. Erdogan did get something: “Obama was still permitting Turkey to continue to exploit a loophole in a presidential executive order prohibiting the export of gold to Iran, part of the US sanctions regime against the country.” This was quite a source of enrichment for Erdogan’s circle.

Yet Erdogan, because the CIA was ending its weapons shipments to the Syrian rebels, was being left “exposed politically and militarily,” giving urgency, according to a briefing paper prepared for Dempsey and Chuck Hagel, to the Turkish “need to do something that would precipitate a US military response [as the rebels fell further behind].” American intelligence analysts, the former intelligence officer stated, believed that “the immediate suspect [for the sarin attack] was the Turks, because they had all the pieces to make it happen.” He continued, “We now know it was covert action planned by Erdogan’s people to push Obama over the red line. They had to escalate to a gas attack in or near Damascus when the UN inspectors [investigating an earlier attack] were there. The deal was to do something spectacular. Our senior military officers have been told by the DIA and other intelligence assets that the sarin was supplied through Turkey—that it could only have gotten there with Turkish support. The Turks also provided the training in producing the sarin and handling it.” Whatever the determination of responsibility for the sarin attack, too much points away from Assad’s involvement, while in Obama’s case, too much points toward obsessive concern over regime change which led him to support rebel forces, fictionalize them as “moderate,” sunder Syria’s connection to Russia and Iran, plant the US military, economic, and political presence solidly in the region, and give vent to the expression of personal greatness.

NOVEMBER 24, 2015

### **Where Does It End?: Left Political Correctness**

The activities of the Black Justice League at Princeton to rid the University of any traces of Woodrow Wilson from its history, identity, and entablature are no doubt meeting with wide acceptance among radicals as the prideful admiration of Black Autonomy and Consciousness, a step toward the further eradication of racism, and a modern-day expression of the spirit of Dr. King. As one who has been through the civil-rights wars of the 1950s-60s, beginning with the seemingly harmless act in 1951 of inviting a black student from Morehouse College in Library Science up to my dorm room to discuss Myrdal’s *American Dilemma* in the segregated University of Florida (word spread after we walked into the Main Library together and went up to the circulation desk where I handed him the volume), the result, an early evening visit from six or seven drunken members of Kappa Alpha who tried to break down the door of my room—instead filling it with boiling water through the open transom— and lynch me, to Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, the preliminaries to Selma in 1965, which I described in my *CounterPunch* article, “Education of a (Sometime) Radical,” while teaching at Yale, to my banishment from Yale for radical activities to Detroit and Wayne State for numerous protests in the late 1960s, thence to Michigan State where I tried to fuse civil rights and antiwar activities, I quietly/solemnly DISSENT from the current Princeton experience—and expect a chilling response from CP readers and the radical community.

My image of Black radicalism, beyond a supreme love for Dr. King, is Paul Robeson, both men going well beyond racial consciousness for a wider indictment of America, capitalism, and militarism, all of which is lacking in the Princeton protesters, who cannot see beyond an obvious symbol of racism, Woodrow Wilson, and neglect/ are ignorant of Wilson's larger viciousness in international affairs, starting with the League of Nations (matched by his Siberian Intervention), to build the US as a Leader of the "free world," i.e., counterrevolutionary, anticommunist, pro-monopoly capitalist (Federal Reserve System, Federal Trade Commission, War Industries Board, all under his watch), in sum, a principal architect of America as we now know it, seeking unilateral global dominance for its advanced stage of industrial-financial-military capitalism, hovering on the edge, and ready to take the plunge into, out-and-out fascism, whose hallmark is the interpenetration of business and government, an elitist social-cultural formation, at the expense of the nation's working class and poor.

Of this, the Black Justice League is apparently wholly ignorant, content instead to sound off in simplistic political correctness to assuage feelings for slights and injured pride. TS. There's a world out there far uglier than what they are encountering at Princeton, and instituting mandatory sensitivity classes is like asking the Nazi executioners at Belsen-Belsen to say "Please" as they shoved Jews into the ovens. In other words, BJL and especially its white supporters are superficial young people mounting imaginary barricades as, from what I've seen from my own experience with some black leaders obfuscating protest to, consciously or not, shield capitalism and militarism (but NOT Dr. King) as part of courting popularity with a wider audience, on an ego trip haughtily puffing away at their supposed base condition.

Given the prominence of Woodrow Wilson at Princeton, why did they go there in the first place? If they are so mindful of racism, including its symbolism, why not, while still in high school, research their college choices—perhaps even, for the sake of racial purity, choose a Black school? If I may be contumacious, especially as judged by fellow radicals, I would subordinate, indeed, always have subordinated, race to class as the societal foundation for transformative freedom and democracy, and that means, as the object of principled, focused agitation, subordinating racism to the basic confrontation with capitalism itself, the source, ultimately, for racism in the first place. Capitalism = hierarchy + exploitation, regardless of race, the place of Blacks in the Grand Schema merely adding zest, profits, ease, and normalization to the exploitation.

By the logic of the Black Justice League, not only should Blacks at Princeton leave the institution lest their presence signifies complicity with racism, but the same standard should be consistently applied across the board, e.g., Black football players at southern universities such as Ole Miss, Alabama, LSU, Texas, Georgia, etc., schools from day one which were segregated until well into the postwar period, for by attending, let alone playing for, these schools they add to their prestige and indirectly legitimize their past. Ditto, the application of purging the past from all associations which directly or indirectly have or still do justify racism—which takes in practically all of the American experience. Political correctness in any form is pernicious by its negation of class consciousness. (I think Oliver Cromwell Cox, a Black sociologist, recognized this in his seminal work, *Race, Caste, and Class*. Simply, BJL had best get over its simpering, short-sighted, however sincere, way, and get down to business.) This is not an attack solely on Black protest, for Occupy Wall Street and other manifestations of pseudo-radicalism, do not, despite the latter's title,

go directly against war, capitalism, generic exploitation, all of which underlay the political-social-economic dynamics of racism.

I'm disgusted with posturing, while the woods are burning, the rapid descent into political hell of both major parties in America, a president whose objective policies could well touch off the Third World War through his threatening confrontations with China and Russia, as meanwhile kissing the derriere of Wall Street and assorted reactionaries, as in his latest DoD appointment, on the domestic and world scene. Sure, Wilson was a bad guy. But so was John Fitzgerald Kennedy, so was practically every US president (I partially exempt FDR), if not avowedly on civil rights, then on the structural-social context on which racism thrives: a hierarchical system of wealth and power, founded on corporate concentration, an ethic of superiority for those benefiting from such a system, a glorification of war and force, a contempt for those held to be weak and/or inferior. If Black students at Princeton are serious, let them excel in their studies first, last, and always, and then go out into the world to change it for the better—yes, as radicals who perceive the larger picture of oppression and repression. Paul Robeson knew that Blacks will not be free until ALL men and women are free; racial feeling is a device of Capital to split the protesters apart, or to keep them together on carefully sanitized lines, so one takes down entablature while the other applauds. It sounds like Christopher Eisgruber, the president of Princeton, is just such a patsy for giving in to demands of political correctness. I term such a phenomenon, for he is not alone among university presidents, liberal fascism, in this case, placating the disaffected through political cosmetics that bring them back into the consensus. Rather than sensitivity sessions for students and faculty alike, send both out to the slums of America, to the countries that America has devastated and need rebuilding, and challenging the corporations and arms factories sucking the blood out of humanity. For these, too, are part of a good liberal education in the best sense of the phrase, a well-grounded cosmopolitanism not afraid of being a part of radical social change.

Wake up, BJJ and study like never before, to see that Woodrow Wilson is the mere surface of a society which discriminates not only against Blacks, but humanity and Nature all for the sake of filthy lucre and the thrill of conquest. Wake up, all Blacks who possess a passion for freedom (whose historical deprivation makes them uniquely suited for a vanguard role in transforming America, while much of the white working class has succumbed to the blandishments of hate—yes, against Blacks, but all immigrants and those at home who lack the requisite patriotism and martial spirit), many of whom nonetheless forming a core constituency of Hillary, possibly the most dangerous person among the current presidential contenders. I have written recently about the power of saying No—No to the ethnocentrism/xenophobia on which ruling groups thrive and capitalism keeps the population in line by scaring into their arms for protection. At Princeton, instead of a Milque-toast occupation of the president's office, stand firm against military recruiters when they come to campus, or representatives of Morgan, Chase, or the armament crowd, etc. etc., the vultures who feed on all of us, if you want to see the props of racism knocked out. Racism thrives on freezing the status quo; a far nobler task than you are presently involved with, viz., removing a mural, changing the name of a residential college and that of the School for International Affairs, would be to fashion your individual strengths, skills, personal commitment to the democracy of the many, and come out swinging.



NOVEMBER 27, 2015

## Syrian “Civil War”?: No, A Proxy War of Global Confrontation

The historical parallel for Syria today is the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s, a dress rehearsal for the building wider conflict, only now with the key players arranged differently and ideology scrambled to account for these differences. Nazism is no longer a factor, its place assigned to America in mobilizing incipient world forces of fascism to confront a Left alternative to counterrevolution and unrestrained capitalism. There is no Abraham Lincoln Brigade to fight alongside Republican defenders of democratic government. Obama is Franco, regime change the focus shaping Western alignment (US-EU-NATO) to destroy, not Revolution or Communism per se (both practically nonexistent as Russia evolves through significant mixed and capitalist elements far removed from dynamic socialism), but Russia nonetheless in the cross-hairs still, as, along with China, blocking US unilateral world hegemony as the vanguard for a militarized, advanced-capitalist system founded on the purging of Left social-economic movements and governments. The vision is totalitarian: anything that interferes with domination, pure and simple, of the West, the US as its epicenter, with respect to Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Third World as conveniently defined to include whatever lies outside the boundaries of the West, must be kept in check, ultimately retarded in autonomous development, isolated from each other and sanitized to ensure subordination and servility.

Assad is hardly Fidel or Che in the postmodern world, but Syria’s secularism, by breaking the mold of the Middle East, incites America, like the red cape in the bullfighter’s ring, which finds even ISIS more manageable to deal with, because already a part of the geopolitical landscape, than a state model that rejects religion as the basis for social organization. Secularism has the potential for liberation, perhaps democratization as well, while religion, notwithstanding an extremist expression, as in ISIS, supports a generalized status quo compatible with varying shades of repression, Israel and Saudi Arabia, though among themselves nominally different, archetypal expressions of—from the Western geostrategic standpoint—acceptable modes of said repression. The passionate hatred displaced on Assad, when every tinhorn dictator gets a Washington ovation and get-out-of-jail card free no questions asked, rightly should arouse one’s suspicions. Like pre-World War II Spain, Syria has become the global hot spot, as though now, Assad provides the excuse for going head-to-head with Russia, China in the background as the next adversary to be contained, isolated, if possible, subjugated, like Russia, preferably short of global nuclear conflagration. But who knows, capitalist ideology now so ferociously believed and acted on, that even nuclear annihilation can be stumbled into, if not deliberately headed for, as proof positive of systemic moral virtue.

Putin was not originally cut out for democratic world leadership (the KGB does not deserve a free pass), but as the global dynamics of great-powers confrontation take shape and fall into place, he, almost by default, has already assumed that role and increasingly represents a voice of sanity in arresting the surge of Western (US-led) power toward a bi-level world operationally recapitulating past colonialism harnessed to up-to-date multinational market aggrandizement and accompanying financial ground-rules both supported through control over international organization (a domesticated UN or its equivalent) and parallel institutions (IMF, World Bank, and trade-agreement machinery, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership). This is beginning to look like Lenin’s concept of ultra-imperialism, except that Lenin was no match for our present-day political-military-financial

Cold War honchos. I don't know whether Putin and Xi are, but at least they are free of any illusions that the West seeks a genuine accommodation of peaceful relations, rather than take-no-prisoners conquest. The downing of the Russian jet (no, not the bombing of the passenger jet two weeks ago, but the plane two days ago) is a clear harbinger of things to come: provocation piled on provocation, ISIS not thoroughly vanquished, so as to provide an opportunity for further military expansion and internal police tightening in response until a crisis point is reached and events take over.

The plane downing, I sensed before Putin made the charge, had all the earmarks of having been planned in advance, i.e., the contingency provided for via approval of the US and NATO, and not Erdogan's decision to be made alone, specifically for the purpose of preventing the unity of response between Russia and the West in the wake of the Paris massacre. Events move fast, but even Paris or similar attack was not unforeseen, so that EU/US rapprochement with Russia had to be avoided at all cost. Obama, no longer Franco, is perhaps von Ribbentrop, coyly biding time as the knife turns. (Putin was not far from the truth when he said that he and Russia were stabbed in the back.) I have said before, counterterrorism is the cosmitized, dressed-up version of anticommunism, through cultural-ideological lag a still useful weapon against both Russia and China abroad, radicals, dissenters, whistleblowers at home. Syria will find its parallel in the South China Sea, whatever it takes to foster xenophobia and false consciousness as preparatory to an aggressive posture in world affairs.

Putin will not abandon Assad. Xi will not accept economic-military encirclement. If I had my druthers, Russia would cut off oil and natural gas shipments to the West until it conceded that Russia had a right to exist free from the NATO menace at its borders, neo-fascist threats from Ukraine, and terrorist attacks from Chechnya, while China would strengthen its economic role in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, tearing apart the fabric of American hegemony and forcing it to live within its means—the best thing that could ever happen to it if a democratic society is to be achieved. Eight hundred military bases (and still counting) under bipartisan dispensation, with the full consent of the American people, will lead to more soup kitchens, cries of neglect and desperation in the streets, deteriorating standards of health and well-being, on one hand, enveloping monopolism, waste, environmental ruin, habituation to intervention, covert action, and regime change, on the other, all as a recipe for societal disaster and impending war.

NOVEMBER 30, 2015

### **Israel and ISIS: Needed, a Thorough Accounting**

The tangled web of political alignments in the Middle East appears to have obscured possible connections between Israel and ISIS, so opposite in religious belief systems yet sharing a basic geopolitical framework of realpolitik in identifying their respective enemies. The adage of the enemy of my enemy is my friend, though not historically perfect, may apply here, centered on a common purpose of displacing the Assad government in Syria and, to that end, drawing in the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar to sanctify the marriage of convenience. Israel has been noticeably quiet about mounting opposition to ISIS (ditto, ISIS with respect to Israel), and shares with the anti-Assad coalition clear hostility toward both Iran and Russia, Assad's chief backers. If this were all, circumstantial/conjectural reasons at best, there would be no need to proceed. Yet one is suspicious

when it is seen that the Israeli Air Force has been engaged in bombing raids in Syria in support of the Free Syrian Army and the Al Nusra Front against Assad, as part of the pool of opposition. Too, reports have surfaced of Israeli Defense Force personnel joining with ISIS units (revealed with the capture of an IDF colonel by the Iraqi Army) on the Salahuddin front.

The evidence is scattered, although an ominous picture now emerges. One sees assorted rebel forces, backed by the US and others, which have created a Salafist Principality in eastern Syria, ISIS territory today, that poses a direct threat to Assad. Additionally, Hezbollah is fighting on the side of the Syrian Army against ISIS, reason enough for Israel to oppose Iran, Hezbollah's sponsor, and Assad. Here the UN Disengagement and Observer Force (UNDOF) stationed on the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria has reported seeing that Israel has worked closely with the Al Nusra Front. Also suspicious is the US position, which has been to insist on Assad's removal before the fight with ISIS, an embarrassing position because Russia's involvement with pushing back and destroying ISIS has made America turn reluctantly to cooperate with Russia and temporarily deemphasize regime change. Through all of this, we still do not know why the US is so opposed to Assad, except that in fact Syria is seen by American policymakers as a pawn in the larger game, renewal of the Cold War, directed first against Russia, but with China perhaps the primary target once Russia is isolated, weakened, and compelled to accept an international order founded on US-defined and –controlled financial-industrial-commercial organization, with China being the next stop, to the same end, in America's unilateral status as undisputed global leader.

The stakes are high, as they always are when a militarily powerful nation chooses to operate on the falling-domino theory—push on or go under, granted, an opportunistic psychology, but one that justifies each intervention, each covert action, each regime change (all of which is sincerely believed in the exotic ideological cocktail of fusing ethnocentrism and hegemony inscribed in the mental-set of advanced capitalism) as vital to expansion of the developmental process, an underwriting of military supremacy, and full realization of exceptionalism as befits the national destiny. If not Syria, then someplace else, wherever the planets are in alignment for forcing the confrontation, in this case, ideal for the employment of global force, the EU and NATO arrayed solidly at the Russian border, and the longer-term maneuver to encircle and isolate China as America does for Asia what it has already succeeded in doing for Europe, possess the right to unrestrained market-and-investment penetration backed by the military pivot and multiparty trade agreement. TPP carried on the wings of the aircraft carrier battle groups, just as similar arrangements have been activated and enlivened by NATO: the militarization of capitalism as America's solution to the falling (political-economic) domino theory.

But where do Israel and ISIS come into the picture? Israel is America's talisman; it acts like a charm in bringing America into the center of global rivalries, its defense the gold standard for legitimating intervention, not only in the Middle East but preparing the world for America's role as the supreme architect of counterrevolution. Israel, our lucky charm, confirms by our defense of its existence, US omnipotence in world politics, magnified by the fact if any nation does not deserve protection, in light of its record of ethnic cleansing, subjugation of an occupied people and land, and support of regimes having poor human rights records, makes it an international tough sell thus adding to America's prestige as a force to be reckoned with. If Israel did not exist, America would have had to invent it (paraphrase of Sartre), so well does it reproduce in microcosm America's own character traits of arrogance, cynicism, hardness. What then of ISIS? It as well is a blessing to

American foreign policy, which is why the US has been halfhearted in its eradication. The more repulsive, as in beheadings, the more salutary from the standpoint of massive surveillance at home, the engineering of a crisis atmosphere (to the sacrifice of civil liberties), the internalization of fear, which shifts the political spectrum still further rightward, as in heightened patriotism, anti-immigrant feelings, a trivialization of politics because so much of public policy is placed off limits. An inane marching in lockstep to consumerism and paralysis on issues that matter, from war to the environment to public health to democratization of the political economy.

ISIS is welcome news for habituating the populace to social control. Foreign policy, however, is the chef d'oeuvre, in the eyes of American policymakers, in regards to usefulness. For the entire enterprise of counterterrorism, from which all things repressive is possible, requires just such a terrifying social menace (not that I underestimate its power, viciousness, and imperative need to be combatted) to be effective, and what we find, rather than a straightforward effort at ISIS's riddance, is instead the selective elimination of whomever we declare to be enemies, under the rubric of counterterrorism (e.g., Assad), keeping pure and undiluted the hegemonic paradigm of greatness. The US creation of ISIS may not have been deliberate, but the invasion of Iraq and the US presence in the Middle East (just as earlier, in Afghanistan, with respect to the Taliban), certainly was a major contributing factor. Once ISIS is finally dislodged, probably through forces other than the US and Israel, there will be others of like character, because the breeding ground of international exploitation will not have ceased. Fanaticism feeds on oppression, something the oppressor is ever loathe to admit.

DECEMBER 3, 2015

### **Ibsen Today: Wellsprings of a Poisoned Community**

No, this is not about the Paris climate summit, although tangentially Barack Obama's empty promises of a progressive legacy, because he is in fact wreaking damage on the Earth we love, the chief despoiler less on climate-related than on political-ideological-military matters (themselves the context for undermining the will to humanize/democratize a respect for Nature, which alone, said respect, can halt the greed, venomous assaultive mind-set) poisoning the wellsprings of earth and polity alike. Paris becomes a solemn farce of self-righteous grandstanding when the US is the chief purveyor of violence in the world, Obama the ideal personification of structural traits and social attitudes breeding wanton disregard for the humility and restraint, yes, the unashamed devotion toward all human dignity and environmental justness together defining a moral universe of societal peace, harmony, abundance. For Henrik Ibsen, Obama and America would have represented the perfect embodiment of a community and its leadership (because Obama is not alone, but only a spokesperson for wealth, power, and their combined militarization in a tightly molded historical construct of advanced capitalism informally directed by elites of these groups in a well-lubricated ruling class) held together by a dark secret, one they did not even admit to themselves, of war, intervention, the promiscuous use of everything from false-flag operations, to regime change, to saturation bombing to—the presumably genteel—economic embargoes, destructive of the lives and welfare of ordinary people, the children the ones who are most vulnerable to sickness and malnourishment, in sum, the dark secret of repressing from thought the self-hatred and nihilism leading to unfathomed aggression eating away at the vitals of the American conscience and consciousness.

Here political economy joins philosophy indicting the closed community found in Ibsen's play, "An Enemy of the People," (1882), which I am updating—without doing disservice to his work—to represent a more modern closure, militarized advanced capitalism (nowhere better noted than in present-day US): a structural-ideological integration in which we see a Nazified "folk-community" cemented together, and paralyzed to act otherwise, through its devotion to the leadership of wealth and power, translated as the reification of public opinion to disguise the hierarchical, class-dominated features of the social order. Admittedly, Ibsen did not follow through to the end the characterization of his hero, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, who, after having discovered that the Baths on which his town depended for its income and prestige had been poisoned by environmental pollution, and then mercilessly pilloried for his efforts to reveal the dirty little secret binding the community, stands up more as a Promethean demigod battling the masses (in subjective thrall to the elite), hence more an Ayn Randian figure, than, instead of condemning the people, a revolutionary defiantly challenging the social structure and the upper groups supporting it. But this, after all, is 1882, and Ibsen cannot see beyond the tyranny of public opinion, which he nonetheless ascribes—to his credit—to the power system itself, and, be it said, a capitalism in microcosm with all of the recognizable features of greed uppermost, class dominance, secretiveness (i.e., lack of transparency) in the operation of the Baths and the profitability to the shareholders, the intimidation from above in the subornation of the town's newspaper, aptly called the "People's Messenger," indeed the silencing of all and sundry to validate the secret.

Ibsen knew his capitalism, despite the early dating, and furthermore, knew his liberalism, which he saw as base, opportunist, waiting for the opportunity to show its true colors, rallying to the side of Authority, even suggesting the corruption of the working class for a plebeian fascism by its complicity in keeping the secret and preventing Dr. Stockmann from being heard. The mob scene toward the end, when he is shouted down in public meeting, brings back vivid memories to me of having similar experiences when addressing antiwar rallies in Detroit in the late 1960s, thanks to CIA-sponsored Breakthrough. Stockmann may be pardoned, I believe, his supreme individualism, because of his selfless, really, sacrificial, actions, its elitism notwithstanding, in his refusal to be intimidated as, rather than being hounded out of the community, he stands his ground about the poisoning (despite efforts to buy him off) and seeks to educate the people, speaking on street-corners, to realize their humanity and overthrow the rotten administration (his own brother, Peter, is mayor, complete with the regalia of hat and stick, arch-protector of the Baths, and chief enforcer of the town's conformity, as well as leader in turning the towns-people against his brother). Unrepentant, facing destitution and total ostracism himself and his family, fired from his position as medical officer of the Baths, his daughter Petra fired from her teaching post, thrown out of their house, window panes smashed the night he attempted to speak (after being denied a public venue), to all of these acts of suppression, the response of so-called public opinion, he now became **LIBERATED** and for the first time fully comprehended the horror of political-economic-social privilege. This, although Ibsen does not say it, is the start of Dr. Stockmann's education as a radical, whether now, the journey from Ayn Rand to Karl Marx, doesn't really matter, for he already has seen through the complicity of liberalism with totalitarianism, the fragile character of a free press anxious to placate upper groups and, in performing that service, manipulate and bamboozle the public, the rotten foundation on which business civilization rests.

If I may be permitted to interpolate thoughts on the present based on the play, capitalism has maintained its own secrets, layered as though gift-wrapped in sheets of tinsel so as to prevent the

understanding of collective self-repression in order to keep up the democratic appearances of, particularly in America's case, equality and freedom, as meanwhile we find that a pattern of global domination continues unabated, ditto the destruction of the environment, and poverty along with the shrinking of the social safety net and the ethos of public responsibility for the general welfare is under assault wherever capitalist "austerity" is practiced. The Baths of Ibsen symbolize the crudity of repression modern capitalism, in full-dress military uniform, practices on, not only the Third World, but the helpless, the victims, at home. Not only America, because America is the world leader of capitalism, and in exercising that leadership (e.g., the IMF under its guidance as really a civilian branch of Special Ops, dedicated to regime change) it fulfills the dream of all capitalist powers dating back to Ibsen's own time: stabilization, order, subjugating the people to docile assent, the broadly conceived paradigm of counterrevolution which keeps the world as a two-tiered formation, call it North and South, it doesn't matter, so long as global exploitation is free to continue. When Dr. Stockmann plants his feet solidly on the ground with the masses, which I sense was what he wanted, rather than standing on their heads, it will be a new ballgame, the working class itself shaking loose from capitalist ideological influence so as to combat all the poisoned Baths surrounding, and created by, us—a new ballgame of social decency and human respect. But not Dr. Stockmann, the individualist, the loner, but multiplied thousands-fold, arising from the people and acting in their name and, more important, on their behalf: on OUR behalf, each person, each tree, each river; for pollution, whether political or physical, poisons the wellsprings of life, history, the future.

DECEMBER 4, 2015

### **Tyranny of Accommodation: A Paradigm of Speech Control**

My generation (or before) used to sing, "Love is sweeping the country," but now a more pernicious force is sweeping America, speech control parading under the guise of liberalism, racial and gender justice, a notch upward of humanism transcending the hatreds and discriminations of the nation's past. Ah, feels so cleansing and good to protest again, proving our democratic mettle, reaching out to those amongst us the most victimized, Blacks and Women, in a political culture awash with consumerism and imperialism. Let the Voices of Oppression be heard once more, a Second Civil Rights Movement, American greatness and dedication to freedoms reaffirmed through the stand-up actions of the hitherto despised and/or neglected. A wondrous, joyful sight, its recent culmination the Black Justice League at Princeton and the protest against the House System at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, where the term "Master," insidious in its reminders of slavery, is to be replaced by race- and gender-neutral language. Why not here? For university students are in our time the prototypic radicals mounting the barricades on behalf of all of us.

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This invocation, an appeal to alleviate and rectify the condition of injured sensibilities, is unmitigated pusillanimous nonsense. I have used the imagery before, the woods are burning, by some playwright or other, to indicate and criticize the trivialization of fundamental human suffering at the hands of advanced-capitalism's war machine bent on exclusive global dominance in an age where the remainder of the world is awakening to its dangerous consequences for the Earth's peoples and lands, crops, animals sustaining them. In America especially, we politicize everything

so as to deflect attention from the obvious, namely, that over the centuries we have been perfecting the machinery of degradation and exploitation awaiting our own working and lower classes and, by virtue of the dynamics of capitalist expansion, all whom we can bring down from without. In the bad sense, class trumps all else, class here being a still somewhat loosely amalgamated ruling group made up of industrial, financial, and of more recent origin, military, elites, with the so-called political class its mere servitors. Even now, we, as radicals, simplify, with our soothing rhetoric of the 1%, which, spit out suffices to do our thinking for us, rather than the hard analysis about what are the sources of wealth and power in America. A hierarchical structure of class rule cannot be neatly/symbolically summarized as the 1%, particularly where the apparatus of State Power, above all, in foreign policy, penetrates and controls the lives of the entire society. Yes, class rule = repression; class rule = what I have been terming the militarization of capitalism. Class rule is the incubator and enforcer of false consciousness. Class, then, in the bad sense, the harmful, destructive sense, sucking out the lifeblood of the polity in order to facilitate greater wealth concentration, monopolization of economic life and institutions, privatization of thought, conscience, feelings, each and all corruptive of human freedom and leaving in its place a wasteland of alienation and the inauthentic search for meaning.

But then there is class in the good sense, class democratized, class the weapon of human autonomy—and here we come back to the current state of race-and-gender protest in America. Simply, class must trump race and gender if all are to be free. This is neither to erase racial and gender identities nor therefore create a homogeneous mishmash honed into the Great American Synthesis. True diversity is the precious possession of a social order which thrives on variegation as the catalyst to self-expression and collective bursting forth of creativity. I would maintain, then, class trumps race, class trumps gender, not as some irreducible, irresistible Marxian force of supra-identity, but as recognizing there are greater problems in the world than the gratification of self-identity and ego-fulfillment. Large numbers of people starve every night. Large numbers of people die prematurely, even in infancy, due to lack of clean water, proper sanitation, necessary medicines. AND large numbers of people die, violently, agonizingly, from saturation bombings, drone assassinations, the steady application of force which topples elected governments and raises dictatorial regimes. Death has been inscribed in public policy for some time, no flinching, perhaps even ghoulish delight on the part of the business-political-military elite, all in the name of preserving the American Way of Life. At home, not much better conditions obtain, a rancid public opinion—often composed of those most victimized, as a species of plebeian fascism now seemingly preponderant in political life—yet, as the obfuscation of class interest, the poor mired down in seeming apathy as unemployment continues apace, welfare provisions originating with the New Deal dismantled brick by brick, regulation of banking and industry a travesty of justice, a society beginning to come apart at the seams. To paraphrase Brecht’s “Arturo Ui,” yesterday Colorado Springs, today San Bernardino, tomorrow the World.

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Let’s turn to the present wave of discontent, the injured sensibilities of Blacks and Women in our colleges and universities, who, if they unflinchingly broke through their solipsistic selves and looked about them at the political-structural-ideological depravity of the country’s ruling groups crushing the spirit and destroying the life-chances of those below them in the social structure and labor force (and doing still greater damage to those satisfying their military-economic-financial

agenda abroad), perhaps might recognize the pathetic nature of their complaints, compared to the suffering of others, including of course overwhelming numbers of Blacks and Women themselves, because of name-calling and veiled references (like College “Masters” at Yale). I am not concerned with labelling the students, pampered, spoiled, etc., but I am, when it comes to self-indulgence precisely in the face of the tangible militarism, injustice, and exploitation to which they avert their gaze and studiously ignore. Their protest is hollow, easily met by cowardly administrations wanting to be loved and seen in the best light by their equally politically correct academic peers. Correct a derogatory word, but don’t challenge corporate power, the grinding war machine, imperialistic hubris—on which students, faculty, administrators, alike, are silent. The present student protest is fool’s gold, a lame excuse for accommodating to the reigning power. The woods are burning, and the affected groups are pissing on the fire, their mentors serving up lemonade to keep the stream flowing. How many of the protesters, upon graduation, and for many, further professional training, will join the ranks of the oppressors, Uncle Toms to Morgan, Chase or the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or better yet, for which Yale is famously known, the ranks of the CIA, we’ll have to see. They already have a useful role model in Barack Obama, who in consequential ways has already sold out Blacks and all whom his policies have injured through his attention to war, intervention, a military budget designedly bleeding the ameliorative sectors so desperately in need of support, and his lavish care of Wall Street. Criticism of Obama, or for Women, Hillary, hardly. It’s much easier to go after the wife of the Master of Silliman College, Yale, of which I was a Fellow for three years. (Oops, the word “Fellow” is pejorative, and will have to be vacuumed out of mind, if the students at Yale and elsewhere put their shoulder to the wheel and compile a list of offending words.)

It was not always thus. I marched proudly with Dr. King on several memorable occasions, and once at the suppression of SNCC workers and others in Montgomery in the days leading up to the Selma March, I looked directly into his eyes from a foot away and could see even then this giant of a man living with the fear of assassination. Dr. King did not make the mistake of our college youth today. He knew where the sources of injustice lay, in militarism and capitalism, with racism the product not the cause of Black un-freedom. At the height of his powers he advocated for peace through his protest against the Vietnam War, and he advocated for class in his Poor People’s Campaign, the latter actually leading to his assassination. We forget. We spout names in seeming reverence and then undo the splendid, hard work of a meaningful consciousness of freedom by magnifying slights as though they were the equivalent of barbaric acts of lynching. Blacks and Women have been knocked down, actually and metaphorically spit upon, subject to the raw ugliness of intolerance, ignorance, bigotry, and today, there is still abuse daily evident, but the choice, the challenge, remains—cosmetic or systemic as the focus of protest and social change? A random look at examples over the last several weeks—a far cry from the ruthless police murders of Black teenagers all too apparent (ruthless murders abroad, with impunity, why not at home, for repression feeds on itself, especially when instanced and legitimated from on high, and is of one cloth)—will bear out my point, the contrast between unmitigated authoritarian/militaristic capitalist behavior and expansion on one hand, the campus movement of correct speech on the other.

Here is Nick Anderson and Susan Svrluga’s article in the Washington Post, “Can colleges protect free speech while also curbing voices of hate?”, (November 10), in which they first dance around the issue of free versus hateful speech, quoting university officers who themselves jive-talk the issue, as does Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland: “We have a responsibility to advance the values that define a community. We have to take affirmative steps in education and



outreach before these incidents happen.” My reading between the lines—chalk one up for speech control, as a student who sent a “racist, sexist e-mail” to his frat members was called aside by Loh, asked to apologize and voluntarily left school for the semester, Loh asking “the community to forgive the student and start a dialogue to improve the campus climate in College Park.” The reporters, presumably approving this liberal comforting sentiment, nonetheless, citing an Atlantic article entitled “Coddling the American Mind,” point to the alternative view: “Schools nationwide, public and private, have grappled recently with controversies about speech and expression. Some critics wonder whether colleges have become too politically correct, obsessed with preventing ‘micro-aggressions’ and promoting ‘trigger warnings’ and ‘safe spaces.’”

Not so lucky as the Maryland student was Steven Salaita, his job offer rescinded by the University of Illinois “after critics took offense at the tone of comments he made about Israel on Twitter.” (The more cases I read about, the more fortunate I feel about retirement from the academic world, although in truth I still would have relished a good fight.) Then there was Williams College, its student club, Uncomfortable Learning, having invited Suzanne Venker, an outspoken opponent of feminism, to which students objected. “Reaction was so intense,” write the reporters, “that students canceled the event, concerned for her safety. A student then reinvited her, but she declined.” Chalk up another one for speech control. At Wesleyan—frankly I expect better from Williams and Wesleyan, which in former days had outstanding radicals and dissidents on their faculties—the student paper, the Wesleyan Argus, “faced a sharp backlash in September after publishing an opinion piece critical of the tactics of the Black Lives Matter movement. The student government later took steps toward cutting the newspaper’s budget for next year.” Yale, however, deserves the spotlight for leading the charge for correct speech. Two mortal incidents guaranteed to shake the very heavens: first, “fraternity brothers turned black women away from a party, saying, ‘White girls only,’ a claim the fraternity’s president has denied. The university is investigating the incident.” (Disclosure: self-respecting women, regardless of race, had best stay away from these fraternity parties, at least as I recall an earlier day.) Second, the wife of Silliman College’s master, Erika Christakis (bless her!) “wrote an e-mail raising questions about a message from school officials that urged students to consider whether their Halloween costumes might offend someone by stereotyping a culture or race.”

Halloween costumes, while America has 800 military bases around the world, its DoD buzzing with geostrategic plans and operations threatening global confrontations, gun violence run amuck at home, businesses merging and consolidating at unprecedented rate, presidential politics reduced to a proto-fascistic base line, while the president himself is busily occupied with regime change and covert actions—Halloween costumes? Somebody, both students and administrators alike with their screw-ball prioritizing; she and her husband offered to debate the matter, but “their comparisons to debates about free speech and ‘trigger warnings’ only made students angrier.” Now, more briefly, to Yanan Wang’s article, “Harvard College ‘House Masters’ to get new titles because of slavery connotation,” also in the Washington Post, (December 2), in which the reporter explains: “Ivy League institutions adopted the term from British Schools, notably Oxford and Cambridge, where ‘master’ survives as a shorthand for ‘schoolmaster’ or ‘headmaster.’ But in the American context, the ‘Master’ moniker, which is also used at Yale and—until very recently—Princeton, has been criticized for its associations with slavery. Students and faculty alike have pointed out the title’s unsettling historical connotations. Its elimination has figured among demands from student protesters at Harvard and Yale. And now it’s becoming clear that the hoary title is on its way out.” I

guess I'm too old, and the gesture quite utterly futile, to give back my Harvard doctorate, but again sounding nostalgic, Harvard was not like that years ago. We were, in addition to our studies, too busy picketing every Friday afternoon against nuclear testing and Saturday noon picketing in the Square Woolworth's for lunch-counter desegregation in the South—that in addition to working under professors of all political and ideological persuasions, or none at all.

Nuff said. Rather than give a full account of what is transpiring on this issue at Harvard, I close with this terse statement, “Harvard College Dean Rakesh Khurana announced in an email to students Tuesday night [Dec. 1] that leaders of the university’s undergraduate residences have agreed to forego the title of ‘Master,’” now followed by his statement: “I write on behalf of myself and my fellow residential House leaders [he could not bring himself to say, House master, in an earlier interview stating he has “not felt comfortable personally with the title”] to let you know that the House Masters have unanimously expressed desire to change their title. In the coming weeks, the College will launch a process in which members of the House leaders’ docket committee, working with senior College team members and the House leadership community as a whole, will suggest a new title that reflects the current realities of the role.” The decision, he added, if “current realities of the role” did not already say enough, approved by Harvard president, Drew Faust, “has taken place over time and has been a thoughtful one, rooted in a broad effort to ensure that the College’s rhetoric, expectations, and practices around our historically unique roles reflects and serves the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of residential student life.” A process meticulously described with all of the care of an Eichmann. Orwell, tennis anyone?—as those of us so inclined retreat to our dormitories, classrooms, and offices, and perhaps sulk, while the rest of us continue the fight, the same fight for social justice, sans concerns about Halloween costumes, and oppose war, vicious wealth distribution, the cunning mind-set that gives us massive surveillance, a titillating consumerism, and essentially the evisceration of both nature and humanity.

DECEMBER 7, 2015

### **Evolving Geopolitical Economic Framework: US vs. China**

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a game changer in what had been since World War II and Bretton Woods American global financial dominance in facilitating US unilateral market penetration via the preponderant voice in IMF and World Bank operations and policy making, and, equally significant, integrating expanding economic power with an interventionist military underpinning. Thus far, America has had it its own way both in the politicization of the world structure (e.g., the Marshall Plan as an early initiative in precipitating the First Cold War, and carried forward into the Second with the fusion of the EU and NATO) and, within the US, the militarization of capitalism as the crucial developmental process (an advanced-capitalist system reaching apogean maturity) sustaining its further growth. No longer. There is a new kid on the block challenging this pattern of hegemonic globalization, yes, relatively speaking, “kid,” having the vitality, growth potential, AND capacity for alternative planning, thinking, and organization, which America, on a descending path toward political-economic senility, no longer possesses.

It was only a matter of time before the AIIB made its appearance, China, once having achieved its consolidated economic base (and population shift to heightened urbanization) accompanied by an ideological adaptability shaking off Maoist orthodoxies, as in the Cultural Revolution, has now

come into position to confront the West (chiefly the US and EU) on an equal plane through a parity of economic strength. Washington has been blindsided, its very reliance on militarism as the solution to all its problems, industrial, trade, financial–ideology to the point of rigidity the primary orientation lo these many years–forcing one-sided arrangements on its presumed friends and allies, has ultimately backfired, becoming the engine of its economic descent and political-cultural decline. If I were a moralist, I'd term this the wages of sin, war, intervention, regime change, punctuated by covert actions, special forces, drone assassination, embargoes, all for the retrograde purpose of counterrevolutionary stabilization, retrograde, because this course is no longer historically feasible as we find multiple ascending forces in the world, not only China, but much of Asia, including India, and the whole of Africa and Latin America ripe for full-throttle modernization.

The balance of world power is shifting away from the West under present US leadership, to the extent that the AIIB is gaining support and membership in Europe itself, suggesting not that the EU and NATO will dissolve tomorrow, but that the built-in belligerence therein instilled through US influence and pressure may be breaking down, leaving America high and dry rather than, as planned, isolating and containing Russia and China, the chief long-term US aim and purpose. A disaffection in the ranks is not being looked on kindly by the Obama administration, which may partially account for the stridency and note of urgency in current policy vis-à-vis China (Russia a sideshow to keep NATO still in line, the Turkish downing of the Russian jet precisely the kind of provocation intended for that purpose) as though advancing the timetable of US confrontation with China lest the Grand Alliance break up. One senses a desperation and frenetic diplomatic activity in response to the sudden visibility of the AIIB, in the realization that China is taking on America, not on the battlefield, but largely on the US's own professed terms: trade, investment, and industrial development. "Better dead than red" no longer seems applicable as a shibboleth for justifying hostility toward China, although the campaign of counterterrorism subtly invokes and/or calls to mind the earlier anticommunism in stimulating the fears of the American public, leaving a residual though latent taint on China transferring that fear to the present. (I leave the Republican party, its Congressional members, and especially its presidential candidates outside of the discussion, their near-unanimous knee-jerk reaction of favoring war at the drop of a pin, in contrast to the sophisticated retrogression and platitudinous liberalism by its opponents to the same end, leaves them unsuited for other than catastrophic solutions which would prove still more disastrous, as America's friends and allies appear to realize. The choice between the power-politics of stabilized confrontation and Armageddon awaits the nation, but in fairness to the Republicans it should be said that the present Democratic administration and the party at large are hardly risk-adverse, forming a dangerous bipartisan coalition on essentials of war and peace.) The move to discredit, and excite terror of, China in the eyes of the West, if not in that of the world, is nowhere more evident than in America's conscious and unconscious realization of Chinese ascendancy, a world trend which, agonizingly, is matched by America's own decline.

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Do I exaggerate the trend, and is this ascendancy merely so recent as to coincide with breaking news about the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank? No, on both counts. China has been in the business of developmental economic planning, investment, and construction, particularly attentive to Third World needs, for some time, as have the AIIB's own diplomatic and financial activities, both backed by the Chinese government. (Let me be clear: I am not a cheerleader for capitalism,

and given China's transformational energies in that direction, e.g., as manifested in its loan policies and investment acumen, I would have preferred a decisively socialist direction for that country and therefore its impact on world politics. But the issue here is not a love of China, although I think it represents far less of a threat to world peace, because of its ascendant position, than the US, desperate to reverse its long-term if not imminent decline. Pulling at the military ropes to stay afloat lends an air of risk-taking to the overall foreign policy framework.) Consider then a New York Times article, "China's Global Ambitions, Cash and Strings Attached," by Clifford Krauss and Keith Bradsher, the latter words tacked on, in typical Times fashion, to ensure conveying the paper's animus toward China, even though the article is quite neutral. The date: July 24, 2015, before the head-on US assault on the AIIB, but when Obama's military pivot to the Pacific had already become familiar policy.

This concerns only one country, in America's backyard, Ecuador, which already sets off political-economic-military alarm bells, the more so because of location and because there are countless other examples of Chinese investment in Latin America and Africa, originally private hunting preserves for American capital, especially in riding the wave of European de-colonialism of the Third World. Yes, expansion, but hardly Western-brand imperialism at the point of a gun, and—the title—with strings attached. The reporters begin, infrastructure to the foreground: "Where the Andean foothills dip into the Amazon jungle, nearly 1,000 Chinese engineers and workers have been pouring concrete for a dam and a 15-mile underground tunnel. The \$2.2 billion project will feed river water to eight giant Chinese turbines designed to produce enough electricity to light more than a third of Ecuador." When one reads Paul Baran's Marxian classic work, *The Political Economy of Growth*, the contrast with typical imperialist projects is glaring; instead of building rail and port facilities for the sole purpose of extracting the client country's wealth, the improvement stays at home. Not that China didn't do the other as well, as in the construction of a refinery outside the port of Manta, yet a study of the various projects would show a balance struck on the side of internal improvements, infrastructure per se, which does not rob the country of its resources and prevent its modernization. Chinese capital also built factories, and, Krauss and Bradsher note, even with respect to Manta, "Chinese banks are in talks to lend \$7 billion for the construction of an oil refinery [just mentioned], which could make Ecuador a global player in gasoline, diesel and other petroleum products."

The contrast with Western style investment only gets better (i.e., less vulturish): "Across the country in villages and towns, Chinese money is going to build roads, bridges, hospitals, even a network of surveillance cameras stretching to the Galapagos Islands. State-owned Chinese banks have already put nearly \$11 billion into the country, and the Ecuadorean government is asking for more." Selfless? Surely not, but neither is it narrowly exploitive, for Ecuador is hardly a jewel in the imperialist crown by virtue of population, military prowess, or economic clout, and rather, as the reporters correctly observe, part of a broader societal-historical process of shifting global power: "Ecuador, with just 16 million people, has little presence on the global stage. But China's rapidly expanding footprint here speaks volumes about the changing world order, as Beijing surges forward and Washington gradually loses ground." That The Times sees the latter, America's decline, is somewhat earth-shaking as America's MSM goes. The article also reports that the renminbi is "expected to be anointed soon as a global reserve currency, putting it in an elite category with the dollar, the euro, the pound and the yen"—which actually came about this past week, Washington gnashing its teeth while Bretton Woods negotiators turning in their graves. From gnashing no doubt

to rage though not publicly discussed: “China’s state-owned development bank has surpassed the World Bank in international lending. [The organizations we created after World War II to ensure America’s global economic hegemony are being challenged and/or superseded, grounds enough for consternation and a good deal more, to which must be added, as now, wholesale defections from US iron-clad, no deviations leadership on the financial and banking fronts.] And its effort to create an internationally funded institution to finance transportation and other infrastructure has drawn the support of 57 countries, including several of the United States’ closest allies, despite opposition from the Obama administration.”

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Let’s leave Ecuador, the situation, as I say, being duplicated from Serbia (power plants) to Ethiopia (glass and cement factories) to Venezuela (low-income housing) to Uzbekistan (natural gas pipelines), and bring the analysis up to date, no longer last summer, but AIIB firmly in place, its membership a silent or not so silent refutation of America’s paradigm of unilateral military-economic global dominance. China was excluded from TPP on fallacious grounds, as though the US cared a fig about human rights violations, not only where other nations were concerned but our own record of waterboarding and full menu of torture in black sites worldwide, while China, in contrast, has consistently offered membership to America in AIIB. No takers, of course, the move, even though EU arrangements would be left intact, being seen by the administration as an admission of weakness and capitulation to China’s power—in sum, the falling-domino theory in its economic guise. Even profits cannot supplant the temptations of war, which suggests that the US has become so rigidly ideological that the standard premises and goals of capitalism are being cast aside in what is fast becoming, on the US side, a Manichaeian world view of ceaseless struggle, the framework of adversaries widened from Russia to include, still more imperatively, China.

Jane Perlez’s informative New York Times article, “China Creates a World Bank of Its Own, and the U.S. Balks,” (Dec. 5), this time an accurate title, provides a clear view of the bank’s genesis, its operations, and China’s conception of its role in international politics and economics. The sub-heading, “In setting up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China enlisted American allies, including Britain, even as Washington expressed skepticism,” previews the telling point that a direct blow is being struck at US global supremacy, with ramifications affecting EU and NATO stability via a possible tug-of-war emerging from a bipolar economic world. To America, any sign of disloyalty is a mortal sin, economic, military, anything for that matter. This is the cost of a half-century and more of arrogance backed by military force—a brittle mind-set that demands obedience to its dictates, leaving an ethnocentric we-they dichotomy in its wake.

Perlez begins by discounting the view of China’s ulterior motives of selfish aggrandizement and surreptitious moves toward global military conquest, both currently in vogue in the US: “As top leaders met at a lush Bali resort in October 2013 [note the date, early enough to indicate both the plans for model reconstruction and the test, in the intervening time, on whether profession has been translated into practice], President Xi Jinping of China described his vision for a new multinational, multibillion-dollar bank to finance roads, rails and power grids across Asia. Under Chinese stewardship, the bank would tackle the slow development in poor countries that was holding the region back from becoming the wealth center of the world.” Kerry at the time congratulated Xi, “That’s a great idea,” but, she reports, “the enthusiasm didn’t last long, as the Obama administration began a rear-guard battle to minimize the bank’s influence.” What follows is sheer

gibberish, not the fear of military-economic competition, but that China would not respect human rights—or rather, both, the latter considerations becoming well-worn State Department talking points (mine, not Perlez), and worse still, the implied corruption associated with the loans: “The United States worries that China will use the bank to set the global economic agenda on its own terms [as had the US for decades when it was in the driver’s seat], forgoing the environmental protections, human rights, anticorruption measures and other governance standards long promoted by its Western counterparts. American officials point to China’s existing record of loans to unstable governments, construction deals for unnecessary infrastructure, and villagers abruptly uprooted with little compensation.” If the record is so bad, why the alarm; China would be hoisted on its own petard.

Ascribing base motives to others may in fact reflect back on one’s own acts (e.g., drones, covert actions) and thoughts (claims ranging from Exceptionalism to liberal humanitarianism), thereby requiring the denial of the reality of one’s own GUILT and projecting both guilt and the larger reality of stiffing through corruption and misdeeds the victims of one’s own claims to power. I submit that China’s record of developmental assistance, although hardly lily-white, is directed to the real needs of disadvantaged nations and peoples, not the enrichment of assorted cliques in exchange for military bases, safe havens for administering torture, or rules stacked in favor of US market penetration. Those closest to America either appear to be catching on to the one-sided business arrangements, as in TPP and the EU-IMF-World Bank ground-rules for trade, or, equally if not more disheartening from the US’s standpoint, are only going along with the tide, sensing the way the wind is blowing. Perlez writes: “But the administration suffered a humiliating diplomatic defeat last spring when most of its closest allies signed up for the bank, including Britain, Germany, Australia and South Korea. Altogether 57 countries have joined, leaving the United States and Japan on the outside.” And she adds, matter-of-factly: “The calculation for joining is simple. China, with its vast wealth and resources, now rivals the United States at the global economic table.” The IMF’s inclusion of the renminbi this past week is one more match to light the fire of America’s demiurgic itch for Great Powers-showdown.

We are coming full-circle, the inversion of the starting place, in which America was all-powerful and now has to relinquish control of the global economy. “China is taking direct aim at the current development regime,” Perlez, recognizing the import of pending change, observes, “the Bretton Woods system established under the leadership of the United States after World War II to help stabilize currencies and promote growth.” This is an epochal change, the kind that the previously supreme nation does not take lying down, perhaps only microseconds away from the stab-in-the-back legends (aka, terrorism) used so effectively in 1930s Germany in Hitler’s rise to power and coming with greater frequency into prominence in America through a bipartisan consensus on domestic surveillance, the dismantling of the social safety net, and a resurgence of gut-xenophobic hatred toward immigrants. Jin Liquin, who will lead the bank, has written a book, “Bretton Woods: The Next Seventy Years,” in which he shows awareness of where the US is coming from, its fear of suffering decline: “The U.S. risks forfeiting its international relevance while stuck in its domestic political quagmire.” And he adds what might serve as an epitaph on American aspirations for maintaining global hegemony: “History has never set any precedent that an empire is capable of governing the world forever.”

My New York Times Comment on the Perlez article, same date, follows:

Perlez's reporting is superlative, giving us a rounded statement of the AIIB. Its formation is explainable in light of the TPP, which pointedly excluded China. I am encouraged by the geopolitical framework evolving: a check on US economic hegemony through a clear balancing of global financial power. But something else is also important: unlike US hostility to the project and Obama's militarization of the TPP through his military "pivot," backed by significant force in the Pacific, we see instead a non-militarized paradigm of growth underscored by European member states and the eschewal of exclusionary policies.

The administration has reason to be concerned: China is running circles around the US, particularly in its investment strategy of focusing on fundamental infrastructure. Yes, we finally have an alternative to the US-dominated IMF and World Bank, one that both Asia and Africa will find more attractive. The Chinese comment that empires do not last forever is very much to the point, though Washington, unlike Cameron and London, is in the deep throes of denial.

The US is first, last, and always ideological, whereas others, China, etc., can pragmatically advance in their growth process. Obama is carrying America over a cliff by his politicization of economic policy, and more, by his zealous determination to confront, encircle, and if possible isolate both Russia and China. He isn't half the mensch that Xi and Jin are.

DECEMBER 8, 2015

### **Manufacturing Fear: America's Growth Industry**

ISIS is a real threat; I do not suggest otherwise. Its baseness is irreducible, no mitigating factors. Yet, America has been instrumental in its formation, whether as contextual incubator through an international posture of global imperialism or COMPLICIT through the selfsame geopolitical framework in which the US, from its long-standing commitment to "anticommunism" as the generic alarm on behalf of shaping domestic mechanisms of social control and policies of counterrevolution abroad, has aligned itself in a self-constructed power struggle against Russia and China, with similarly reactionary forces, notably, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, in order to check the historical process. Terrorism is an enabling factor in the maintenance and perpetuation of American hegemony. To seek its eradication on the world scene is counterintuitive to the US's mid-life (I'm being charitable) crisis in which it finds itself a declining superpower, less because of an absence of will than because, no longer within its power to control or arrest, the world structure is itself changing and becoming decentralized (no longer susceptible to US unilateral declarations of ORDER) as rival power centers come into being. The US is an anachronism, as the vanguard of retardation of political-economic modernization in the Third World, believing still that military force and negotiated alliances sugared with a lavish dispersal of arms, funds, and bases to all takers will ensure continued ascendancy in the years to come.

To be a vanguard, however, supposes followers—euphemistically, friends and allies, partners—which are precisely beginning to drop away. Obama's great hope in Asia is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, militarily, to contain and isolate China, commercially, to provide absolute political-legal security to American-sponsored multinationals in their quest for markets and cheap labor, protection for patents and intellectual property, etc., which nevertheless is now about to face stiff competition from China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: a sure sign of what is to come as

the changing paradigm of global economic development. Like Britain and France at the close of World War II, America is witnessing the decline of Empire, and all the president's horses and all the president's men cannot put humpty dumpty together again. The analogy is valid, the Open Door (i.e., the Imperialism of Free Trade, as Gallagher and Robinson phrased it) the American equivalent of European colonialism, without the expenses of administration, and both manifestations of political-economic dominance no longer structurally tenable. The US is running scared, more military input wherever possible, as in continued intervention and regime change efforts, more intensified doses of thought control, as in the shrinking boundaries of the political process and general intellectual discourse, more reliance on external explanations to hide internal shortcomings—voila, terrorism, not to be met (although now it may be too late, possibly from the invasion of Iraq, or still earlier, US support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, against the Soviets) with a fundamental reversal of course, away from intervention and regime change, or, the very least, combined de-demonization of the Muslim/Arab world and specific ground policies of total engagement against ISIS no matter who else's ox is gored, i.e., Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and assorted "moderate forces" of opposition to Assad. Indeed, Assad is the present poster boy designated for annihilation, a convenient scapegoat for sweeping under the rug all manner of hidden agendas, such as the role of OIL in the world economy, which are part and parcel of the larger geopolitical/geostrategic conflict to (a) preserve American power, and (b) militarize still further America's confrontation with China and Russia.

Taking the measure of Obama (and, as in Hollywood extravaganzas, a cast of hundreds if not thousands, drawn from the military, think tanks, financial and business groups, opinion makers in the MSM, and the cacophonous voices of proto-fascism of the so-called political class, for he is not alone in making decisions, and is rather a sounding board for ruling groups which make up the American power structure) as in his Oval Office apologia for maintaining the current counterterrorism schema, one finds suspicious activities in dealing with, or not dealing with, ISIS, as e.g., the failure of the US to bomb oil tankers until now (and under Russian pressure), laden with oil from ISIS-controlled refineries and critical to financing its advances, the demand for closing the Turkish border to Syria until now (ditto Russian pressure) which was an open sesame for jihadists, and the entire role of the Saudis, as part of the wider Sunni offensive both to overthrow Assad's secular government and neutralize Iran's influence in the Middle East. This scratches the surface of US involvement in the region (as numerous writers have observed, ISIS appears to have shown no interest in Israel, perhaps part of the quid pro quo until now—Russia's entrance into the regional conflict aimed specifically at terrorism being seminal to the changing picture—and its heretofore tepid response to ISIS. But Obama cannot have it both ways, conjuring a threat and, by all reports, inducing fear if not paralysis among Americans, at the same time that he skirts around the margins of conflict (air power alone hardly the magic bullet).

I have never been one for conspiracy theory, and, hopefully denying its presence here, I would suggest that the contrived atmosphere of FEAR that has taken hold in America, contrived, in that the stock-in-trade of political life from Washington to the Iowa hamlets, speaks to ulterior motives wholly beyond the measures needed to curb terrorism as a definable force. Of course, from day one the decision was made to by-pass the UN in favor of a US-led organized alliance system which mirrored the realpolitik of American aims on the world scene, utilizing terrorist groups—and its own Special Ops-CIA mode of terrorism to topple what were designated as the adversary from Vietnam to Africa to Latin America—for regime change and/or keeping in power local dictators, all



outside the UN framework which the US, like Israel, viewed as poisonous and flaunted at every turn. Yes, my broad-stroke analysis is circumstantial; it would be horrendous to think the US was complicit in the rise and activities of ISIS. We have seen the genesis of the Contras, death squads, armed insurrections, the daily business of the American government in times past; we have seen from McCarthyism through the Patriot Act a hostile environment to progressive ideas and dissent; we have seen a government more invisible in its workings than ever, itself stirring up fears of unrestrained power and having the desired ambiguous effect of seeking its protection (displayed through ardent patriotism) and feeling intimidated by and in its presence. In light of the foregoing, is it completely wrong to be suspicious that the US has been using ISIS to its own advantage, from a military and capitalistic position, until this moment when ISIS appears like the genii escaping from the bottle, its usefulness at an end, thus forcing America—in part because of Russian intervention—to take a stand opposing it? The world at large, outside of the US-EU-NATO orbit, is becoming increasingly less gullible about the nature of counterterrorism as an end in itself, instead looking warily at the American footprint in the stabilization of a global architecture keeping alive US power and influence.

I turn briefly to Gardiner Harris and Michael Shear's New York Times article, "Obama Says of Terrorist Threat: 'We Will Overcome It,'" (Dec.7), for the immediate background, his address to the nation on terrorism. In the aftermath of San Bernardino, he stated of the couple staging the attack: "It is clear that the two of them had gone down the dark path of radicalization. So this was an act of terrorism designed to kill innocent people." The speech was relatively mild in tone: "We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That does not mean denying the fact that an extremist ideology has spread within some Muslim communities. This is a real problem that Muslims must confront, without excuse." Yet Harris and Shear point out that the use of the Oval Office (only for the third time in his presidency) was "a setting meant to highlight the gravity of a subject," which led to the announcement of screening airline passengers coming to the US without visas, a ban on the purchase of guns by those on the no-fly-list, and unspecified limits on automatic weapons, once again, reasonableness, nevertheless contradicted by continued intervention to unseat Assad, freeze Russia from a prominent role in reaching a settlement, and holding fast to a world view which, rather than halting the efforts of ISIS's enablers, persists along the main lines of US foreign policy with respect to Russia and China—ISIS at best a distraction from renewing the spirit of a new Cold War.

Actually the reporters' account fails to capture the proportions of the threat as expressed in the speech, as, consulting the text, we find Obama placing terrorism front and center via his single-minded obsession to keep America safe: "For seven years, I've confronted this evolving threat each morning in my intelligence briefing. And since the day I took this office, I've authorized U.S. forces to take out terrorists abroad precisely because I know how real the danger is. As commander in chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people." Then the personal touch (cruel of me to say, hearts and flowers, playing to his audience?): "As a father of two young daughters who are the most precious part of my life, I know that we see ourselves with friends and co-workers at a holiday party like the one in San Bernardino. I know we see our kids in the faces of the young people killed in Paris. And I know that after so much war [brought on by himself and his predecessor], many Americans are asking whether we are confronted by a cancer that has no immediate cure." A superb draft drawn up by a committee of the whole, the speech has all the earmarks of issuing a warning of imminent danger backed up by a show of humility and family—to

which I remain unmoved, as I consider the “collateral damage” of his program of drone assassination, the young daughters of others murdered in the process.

“No immediate cure”? Here Obama in Churchillian mode, more daily prominent, as in his self-reference above to being commander in chief—a tinny rhetoric where the White Cliffs of Dover give way to the shores of Chesapeake Bay (and all points north and south), “Well, here’s what I want you to know: The threat of terrorism is real, but we will overcome it. We will destroy ISIL and any other organization that tries to harm us. Our success won’t depend on tough talk, or abandoning our values, or giving into fear. That’s what groups like ISIL are hoping for. Instead, we will prevail by being strong and smart, resilient and relentless, and by drawing upon every aspect of American power.” This last, if one listens closely, is most chilling. Not more so than his peroration however, which pulls out all the stops of patriotic cant: “My fellow Americans, I am confident we will succeed in this mission because we are on the right side of history. We were founded upon a belief in human dignity—that no matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or what religion you practice, you are equal in the eyes of God and equal in the eyes of the law.”

My New York Times Comment on the Harris-Shear article, same date, follows:

Obama appears statesmanlike when compared with the Republican opposition, salivating to press forward with total war; yet his own remarks are fraudulent and contrived, invoking the spirit of Dr. King’s “We Shall Overcome” and praising America as exceptionalist and possessing unsullied democratic values. In truth he deep-down reflects the same contempt for democracy as his Republican opposition. Would ISIS have had the same recruiting success, indeed genesis, absent the US record of war, intervention, covert action, regime change, drone, assassination, embargoes, etc. etc, a long shadow of disgraceful imperialism and global military hegemony?

In a profound sense, America created ISIS by its pattern of military-financial-commercial globalization, playing up to, if not creating, dictatorial regimes to smoothe the way to market penetration and related activities. As for the US’s previous record on attacking ISIS, Obama’s critics have a point that America has been slow and desultory, but they don’t ask WHY. Perhaps Obama and the US found (until the situation, as now, got out of hand) ISIS was useful to have around, justifying the full dimensions of counterterrorism policy, e.g., massive surveillance within the country itself, and of course legitimating ever-expanding military budgets at the expense of both infrastructure and the social safety net.

America is declining not because of terrorism but its moral collapse in furthering the agenda of an advanced stage of capitalism.

DECEMBER 11, 2015

### **Dark Forebodings: America at the Cross-Roads**

No, neither the Hebrew prophet Amos nor Priam’s daughter Cassandra inspires these thoughts, but the actual condition, ideological/psychological, of the contemporary American mindset, and its material foundations, an overly-ripened stage of capitalist development needing a constant infusion of power abroad, inner certitude at home, to maintain an acceptable rate of economic growth and

the conviction that its military strength is sufficiently intimidating and in evidence as to provide for the unilateral determination of the global structure after its own wishes and image. Nothing short of that would satisfy, a nation running on (moral) empty, fear-ridden in extremis, unwilling and unable to adapt to the prevailing realities: its own deeds of commission, the principal war-maker, intervener, cause of human suffering, since World War II, which has in turn stimulated dislocations and engendered resistance, and the interrelated historical-political dynamics, partly in response, partly a function of independent industrial, technological, and scientific forces unstoppable as previously underdeveloped, exploited, countries, realizing their own potential and acting on it, demand a place for themselves and their people at the World Table. The US is no longer the sole determiner—if in fact it ever was, taking into account the incipient thirst for freedom of the persecuted and downtrodden which would eventually find expression—of human destiny. Time is not, and perhaps should not be, on America's side, as it bullies all in its path whilst the international system exhibits gradual yet drastic and permanent change.

The notable change is a growing decentralization of world power, America's holding action via counterrevolutionary policies which have thwarted Third World autonomy and fostered global armament races intended to keep its real and potential rivals in check no longer seems to work. As plainly seen, the Emperor wears no clothes, or rather is so sheathed in body armor as to be weighted down with Maginot-like walls of defensiveness inculcating a spirit of pervasive fear of the Stranger (this week the governor and attorney general of Texas tried to prevent a family of Syrian refugees, including six children, from settling there, on the ground that they and others might be suspected terrorists, part of a landslide sentiment opposing immigrant settlement). Trump, as we know, advocates for wholesale proscription of Muslims, and despite gestures from all sides of disagreement, it is obvious he has struck a sympathetic authoritarian chord in Americans' minds, one inseparable from the nation's championing of so-called gun-rights, an amalgam of rigidifying ideology synthesizing ethnocentrism and preternatural violence as the raw materials of proto-fascism. No question, that is the direction the country is heading, these eruptions of gun violence merely the surface twitches of a society denied its dream of conquest on the world scene.

We as Americans internalize the militarization of our value system, transmogrifying it from one that purports to be democratic, however dishonored in historical practice, to that of an assault on the rule of law as a solemn compact between government and people to ensure equality as a human birthright. Instead, billionaire is the new arithmetic of American capitalism, corporate mergers (today, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, tomorrow, who knows what's next?), and further never-ceasing attempts at regime change accompanied by agreements integrating defense and trade into a geopolitical structure bent on rolling back the historical process to recapitulate the benefits of traditional imperialism, to which, in addition to market penetration and securing raw materials, we find in US-sponsored globalization a range of ambitions unknown to the late-19th century, its heyday, such as outsourcing industrial production and control of international finance. Globalization is merely America in macrocosm, or so it is hoped. Even Europe, its kept ally in all things commercial, financial, and military, is beginning to demure, as in looking fondly at China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In fact, where the American Empire may find itself most vulnerable in the short run, its Achilles' heel being exposed for the first time, is not the challenges mounted by China and Russia to its economic supremacy, but a disillusionment with America's iron-clad determination to remain on top of the changing world system on the part of Britain, France, and Germany. The EU-NATO shield and spearhead for US control of the West, extending

to the Russian border, is starting to crack, just as comparable plans for Asia are also, now with AIIB and firmer cohesion of the BRICS, ready for the ashan.

But not without a fight. The US is tightening its hold on its own people, if not in preparation for Armageddon (the prominence of religious zealotry is surely a sign of contemporary amorphous fears increasingly pointed to the search for scapegoats), then at least a take-no-chances view of security as the new Absolute already previewed in NSA's massive surveillance program of the American public, whose genesis lies in decades of pumped-up anticommunism to destroy the spirit of political and mental independence. It's the season for Handel's Messiah, in which we hear the echo of a more innocent and trusting time in the words, "We all like sheep have gone astray," which thought now becomes mandate and license for reducing humans into sheep and penning them up, lest any go astray and seek social justice and international peace. Welcome, the 2016 presidential election, wherein we are "free" to choose from the likely candidates the Maximum Leader to take us down the path of a Vesuvius discharge of hatred toward whomever and whatever appears a denial of American Exceptionalism. Who needs a social safety net, save for the manifestly unfit; ditto, those who shy away from aggression and confrontation with America's Enemies, to which, beyond unfitness, we must add the lack of patriotism. A boiling cauldron of ethnocentric withdrawal awaits the American future.

DECEMBER 15, 2015

### **Hillary Clinton: Ilse Koch of Chappaqua**

At first sight, the comparison between Hillary Clinton and Ilse Koch may seem farfetched, impudent, even hysterical, but I think not, for we are tapping a deep-lying thread of amoral cynicism common to both which leads to a desexualization of cruelty as each proudly enters the "man's world" of identifying with war, violence, militarism—Koch's familiarity with, influence in, and personal satisfaction from, playing an administrative role in the Nazi death camps, and Clinton's advocacy of force, calling for surges in Afghanistan, boasting she can "belt 'em down" with the best of the military class, and, as Secretary of State, leading the charge for US global hegemony helping to set the agenda for confrontation with Russia and China. Both can be seen as team players in an authoritarian framework of government. Both owed their prominence to complicity with the commission of atrocities, Koch, the Beast of Buchenwald (aka Die Hexe [Witch] von Buchenwald), who selected tattooed prisoners to be murdered and skinned, evidence pointing to the skins being used as lampshades, Clinton, less dramatically, promoting and/or endorsing the entire record of barbarism from Iraq onward fueling administration pugnacity (e.g., Libya), whether as First Lady, Senator from New York, Secretary of State, or now, the leading Democratic candidate for president, still unflinching in moving one or two steps ahead of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I say desexualization because, ironically she skillfully plays the gender card and expects massive political support from women while simultaneously cultivating the image of the uber-mensch, toughness, combat-ready, experienced in the ways of geopolitical planning and thinking, in sum, a commander-in-chief in waiting, hard-as-nails, we can be sure, in protecting the American Homeland! (The difference between a Trump and Clinton presidency is miniscule, certainly in foreign policy, but also, given her closeness to Wall Street, in domestic as well.) I don't have the

stomach to dwell on Koch's biography; her Nazi concentration camp record speaks for itself. But as a base line for analysis, she provides a grotesque example of what a power-driven ego can do with respect to riding roughshod over human rights. Under the cloak of respectability, our Hillary truly takes the cake, stalwartly marching in lockstep with, since her husband's presidency down to the present (and we can assume the future), every intervention, regime change, covert action, distribution of military assistance to "friends and allies," accompanying trade agreement to buttress US commercial penetration, all of the foregoing and more, the pivot to Asia, imposed austerity measures via the IMF and World Bank on nations struggling with debt, as part of the vision she shares with political-military leaders of American unilateral global dominance.

Hillary has desexualized her presidential candidacy and ambitions by transcending gender in favor of demonstrating an iron will, toughness, the art of realpolitik, all on behalf of US financial-military power directed to shaping the global structure to America's advantage. This Wall Street-Pentagon integration of national identity would ordinarily mark a Rightist ideology and practice, which in any case summarizes the bipartisan consensus/coalition on war, intervention, regime change she personifies, but in this case she skillfully obfuscates through playing the gender card as well, in hopes of winning the women's vote and making that a sign of liberalism, indeed progressivism, cancelling out in the public mind the promotion of the governing synthesis of militarism and advanced capitalism. Whether she poses a greater danger to world peace and domestic social welfare measures than, say, Trump, Cruz, or Rubio, is, to me, a moot question. We've heard enough in the current campaign about the lesser-evil-argument (Sanders, I contend, is no better, when it comes to foreign policy, itself decisive as a determinant of democratic prospects at home and abroad), to be put off guard by her record of consistent support for the social and structural foundations of corporate wealth and an active posture of confrontation in foreign policy. Yes, a Democrat through and through, hiding behind seemingly just causes, not to balance out but cover over a Warfare State in expansionist mode.

Hillary has proudly entered a "man's world" valuing an amoral cynicism which has allowed her to politicize gender to suit her convenience while desexualizing the framework and atmosphere of POWER so as to sanction yet exonerate cruelty and violence because acting in the name of American democracy and exceptionalism. This goes a long way in defining the cornerstone of a unitary domestic-foreign policy which, as her record of silence on massive surveillance, drone assassination, economic embargoes destructive of health and well-being, suggests an affinity toward authoritarian governance most recently highlighted by her repudiation of transparency in maintaining a private email account while serving as Secretary of State. In that position, she led the charge on global hegemony, calling for confrontation and containment with respect to Russia and China, the surge of troop strength in Afghanistan exceeding the requests of the Joint Chiefs, and the overthrow of Gaddafi and Assad resulting in the widespread devastation of both Libya and Syria and its attending human misery. Ukraine, too, following neocon dictates, was a case of regime change having extreme consequences for the reawakening of Cold War tensions.

But whether as First Lady, Senator from New York, Secretary of State, or the leading Democratic candidate for president, we see a continuity of pugnacious behavior harnessed to a larger-than-life ego-formation which gives vent to (again my theme of a desexualization of power/politics) her cultivation of the uber-mensch imagery, simultaneous with using the gender card in the expectation of gaining massive political support from women. This opportunistic

contradiction features themes of toughness, combat readiness, experience in geopolitical ways of planning and thinking, in sum, a commander-in-chief in waiting, hard-as-nails, which is then softened by a no doubt genuine regard for health and children's issues (the Democrats' peculiar mix of welfare-warfare) that nonetheless creates a context harmful to both health and children as in the weakening of the social safety net at home and carnage affecting children abroad. This is less a matter of hypocrisy than a self-justifying arrogance of power, exceptionalism its public-relations exterior, of which Hillary merely exemplifies what the nation at large believes, hence a hidden source of her appeal, the confidence reposed in her to protect the American Homeland and, be it noted, in concert with a comforting liberalization (in ideology) of the practice of war.

Under the cloak of respectability, Hillary marches in lockstep, since her husband's presidency to the present (and we can assume the future), with every intervention, regime change, or covert action, every distribution of military assistance to "friends and allies" along with accompanying trade agreement to buttress US commercial penetration, all of the foregoing and more, the pivot to Asia, imposed austerity measures via the IMF and World Bank on nations struggling with debt, as part of the vision she shares with political-military leaders of American unilateral global dominance. In her various roles, she has not been an original thinker (especially in failing to develop and hone an alternative policy-construct to her party's interventionism, which is only slightly less retrograde than that of Republicans, and even on health care, favoring the private insurance forces over a single-payer system). Instead, she is a team player; she smells out the centers of power, muscles in, intuitively senses what sells, what public image she should and could strike, and thus an ever-alert perpetual machine of personal advancement convinced that with each step a milestone she is destined for greatness.

Wellesley, Yale Law, the march for honors and office begins, if not sooner. Our Goldwater Girl discovers early on the political and career advantages of liberalism, advocacy for children (for which I grant her sincerity) a pathway to policymaking which had the effect of strengthening both the military and corporate business, neither of which, as noted, helped to democratize the social system on which children's rights and welfare depend. Though child advocacy and health care may have been well-intended, they were also the perfect gloss for advancing a Corporate Agenda in which government supported capital accumulation, whether through an aggressive policy of market penetration or a regulatory framework sympathetic to banking and business. We see this, e.g., in her acceptance of Robert Rubin's policies as Bill's Treasury secretary, and in her own closeness (as well as her husband's) to the relevant communities of interest, which, as reported, enabled her to give 20-minute speeches to financial and business groups at \$200,000 a throw. Needless to say, the couples' facility for raising large sums of money is legendary. Hillary, like Bill's more-folksy image, is the ideal public face of Wall Street and qua woman that of the Pentagon, granted, a shattering of gender stereotypes, but for that reason an effective voice, particularly as Secretary of State, for torture, regime change, the infliction of collateral damage on civilian populations. (Gender rights as recently established by the Pentagon confers equal participation on women in prosecuting US war aims, and though I do not wish to engage in stereotypy or gender-profiling, this invites complicity in imperialism, intervention, and crimes against humanity, a co-optative move ultimately to the disparagement of freedom for men and women alike.)

Hillary never considered resigning in moral protest against her administration's policies, nor has she subsequently disavowed them, her belligerent tone a hallmark underpinning her national and

party appeal in the current race. Admittedly, in law school there seemed the promise of better things, as in working at Marian Wright Edelman's Washington Research Project, which brought her into contact with the plight of migrant labor, and, in her post-Law School year, at the Yale Child Study Center, which led to arguing for the legal competence of children. Too, she did a stint in Washington researching conditions for impeachment for the Judiciary Committee on Watergate. Then began Arkansas, where Bill preceded her, their marriage, after his many proposals, consummated finally, because she feared a loss of identity detracting from the credit she would receive for her achievements. From 1975 to 1982 she remained Rodham. I have no quarrel with that, only with what in this case it pointed to, a somewhat Nietzschean will to power which played to win, ran roughshod over opponents, and rationalized a tendency to graze the truth. Within Arkansas her ambition flourished, first, joining a prestigious law firm, then Carter's appointment to the Legal Services Corporation board, and a mixed record of investments (Whitewater).

As First Lady, however, she takes off; her interest in child development and health care issues appears genuine, and this combined with active foreign travel and speaking internationally on behalf of women's rights (the Beijing Conference on Women, 1995) raises her political visibility. Wouldst that she paused there, laid a foundation for authentic human concerns, and channeled her ambitions therein, we would have a very different Hillary today, perhaps one who posed an alternative to the bipartisan consensus on war, ethnocentrism, business consolidation. Instead, no such luck, and rather, the White House years and consequent exposure to power bent her in the direction that we presently see, a synthesis of corporatism and militarism which epitomizes the Democratic party itself, making it a pale carbon copy of the Republicans. Amid the salutary work on behalf of children and women, we already find disquieting signs of, at the very least, political hanky-panky, and possible wrongdoing, on the order of the Whitewater Development Corporation, where investment losses had been improperly subsidized through the efforts of Hillary's law firm, the so-called Travelgate scandal, in which financial irregularities of the White House travel office (the relevant memo had been buried for two years) served as the pretext for firing staff to be replaced by Arkansas loyalists, etc., all resulting in avoidance of criminal prosecution and raised eyebrows, while Hillary emerged squeaky-clean. On the Lewinsky Affair Hillary stayed the dutiful wife, one consideration being her own future political career.

In the US Senate she supported the Patriot Act, its reauthorization, war in Afghanistan, and in Iraq, visiting troops in both theaters, and helped introduce legislation enlarging the US Army beyond what the Chiefs had called for. That was the first term; the second was a shoo-in due to a weak opponent, despite which, she raised prodigious sums so as to win big (2/3 of the vote). She was part of a large majority that passed the Troubled Asset Relief Program, a \$700 billion bailout of the banking system following the 2007-08 financial crisis. (Her support of Wall Street, from the days of Rubin, Summers, Geithner, in Bill's Cabinet on, has never wavered.) Still in the US Senate, and reportedly since 2003, Hillary was making active plans for a presidential run, setting up an exploratory committee for 2008, and, locked in primary battles with Obama, the two political fakirs of the first water, neither revealing actual or latent tendencies toward war (Obama under the guise of Exceptionalism, Hillary, Liberalism), the campaign turned in Obama's favor, Hillary at the convention strongly endorsing him.

But it was as Secretary of State that her hegemonic sympathies were fully revealed, a hawk among hawks, whether among neocons or the military, expressing the doctrine of so-called soft

power which combined the bluntness of military force with the sophistication of NGO activities, claims of commitment to human rights, development funds, etc., i.e., liberal humanitarianism at gunpoint. Here gender rights became the fulcrum for continued Afghan intervention, thus placing America on the side of the angels. (Politicizing gender rights, Hillary's signature in the conduct of foreign policy, and now for base support in the coming election, is a classic case of ideological obfuscation while all else remains constant if not, as in global military unilateralism, actually accelerated.) Ah, she got behind the drive to give cookstoves to the world's poor, as though that would alter fundamental power arrangements in these countries as well as in the international setting. More to the point, as Secretary, has been her silence in the face of war crimes committed by the Obama administration, as in regime change, drone assassination, and embargoes designed to inflict privation and suffering. Silence is consent, if not indeed an active role in designing policy, particularly since foreign policy is the area of State's responsibility and cannot be shrugged off. A team player, she represents the cog-in-the-wheel facilitation of human deprivation. The better part of honor, once the record is apparent, would be to resign, and go into opposition—wholly unthinkable to her, on both counts, as well as to Washington in general, not to say the vast majority of the public.

Hillary's interest in the Far East, perhaps because her term as Secretary was still early, is largely unnoticed and then later overshadowed by the Middle East, but her pointed criticisms of China presaged the full articulation of the Obama pivot, as did her cultivation of friendship with the neighbor's of China. Libya though became her baby, all-out intervention, partly to depose Gaddafi, but also bring the Arab Spring under manageable control, with results with which we are still contending. She also supported the Special Ops mission to kill bin Laden, whatever the cost to US-Pakistan relations. And coming more up to date, one finds Hillary even more anti-Assad in Syria than Obama, this already in 2012. She also, going back to Libya, toughened out her response to the Congressional investigation into Benghazi, a look at how she takes criticism which indirectly bears on her contempt for government transparency through her handling of the email imbroglio, which caught her flat-footed in deception and the suppression of evidence.

I think we've seen enough, a trail of war-appropriate public policy and failure to speak out at the abuses of the present government, whether on massive domestic surveillance, regulatory paralysis, ever-expanding Pentagon activism (new bases added to the hundreds in operation), or more of the same when it comes to wealth concentration and respect for the environment, a hardly viable alternative to Trump-Cruz-Rubio and the Republicans. Hillary stands at the top of the slippery slope of fascism, the others already in the process of sliding down, she about to join them at the bottom should she be successfully elected. And yes, not to forget Ilse Koch, I did not mean a point-by-point comparison, but that she and Hillary have respectively pushed their existing frameworks of society to their outer boundaries as the enablers of a political-economic system underwritten by monopolistic organization and fueled by military power, detrimental to the world's population and the instincts of social decency.



DECEMBER 18, 2015

### **Failure of the American Left: Iron-Fisted Co-Optation**

This week, Tuesday (Dec. 15) to be exact, I was a guest on Gary Null's WBAI/Pacifica radio show, preceded by Chris Hedges, a solid analyst and critic of the contemporary social order, to discuss the failure of American radicalism to act as a transformative political-ideological social force in opposition to repression at home, intervention abroad. As usual, Gary's questions prodded interviewees through his penetrating insights to launch into orbit with mini-monologues on the given topic, and Chris was superb in his portion, focusing on Woodrow Wilson's administration, its pursuit of repayment for Morgan and other bankers' loans to European nations threatened by German victory as reason for intervention, its Creel Committee (CPI) steady propaganda to control public opinion, and of course its suppression of radicals, notably the Wobblies, as the genesis for modern-day US antiradicalism. This is persuasive but doesn't go far enough either on Wilson or on America.

Let me here sketch out a more long-term analysis of the problem, not in criticism of Chris, for whom surviving radicalism is in debt for whatever life it still maintains, but merely as a further take on the situation of America's declining Left. First, one must enlarge the historical context, Wilson simply one though perhaps pivotal step in the societal process of curbing and seeking to eliminate radicalism as having legitimacy in what, after all, has been the continuity of American capitalist development from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the present, which has narrowed the boundaries of structural and social change stifling the rise of ALTERNATIVE formations such as socialism and a more humane political culture and system of values. This is not a deterministic formulation, but only points up the conscious functioning and furtherance of class dynamics by which ruling groups have taken control through the normalization of capitalist fundamentals of wealth-and-power accumulation in a hierarchical framework. Exploitation plays a significant role, so does a market economy, so does the Constitutional, legal, and ideological protection of the property right, so does the suppression of labor violence, so does commercial penetration increasingly taking on global dimensions, so does the military factor, whether as the spirit of militarism, naval power in action, intervention, in ensuring the realization of a closed, one-track pattern of growth confronting and dismissive of all challenges to its moral rightness.

For better or worse (and I obviously think the latter), America is locked into a Capitalist Order admitting no deviations from government servitude to its needs for security and expansion, the State invariably the handmaiden of business in its myriad forms and undertakings. Liberalism from the start encapsulates the capitalist world view, as C.B. Macpherson brought out in his seminal book, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, in which proprietorship of the self becomes the primal act of owning, then extended to all things, ownership, next to God in the ranking of beatific splendor; and as Louis Hartz also brought out, in his book, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, in which he argues that America never had a feudal past, that instead it was born mature, a capitalist polity from its inception, having puristic capitalist institutions of property which separated it from the premodern structures and ethos of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. To be born capitalist as a nation, becomes a decided historical advantage in keeping the lid on in circumscribing and circumventing radicalism, placing the burden of proof for social change and democratization always on the dissenter, the protester, the radical. (One need not consult Karl Marx on the commodity structure, declining rate of profit, and other features of capitalism to gain a clear picture of class structure,

alienation, a mono-cultural ideology, and the human-authored sources of historical materialism, for the record is before us and these writers, along with a multitude of others, have shown or implied the profound depths of antiradicalism in the American mind. John Locke is not V.I. Lenin.)

Even the political economy of American slavery, the seeming exception to the central focus on capitalist institutions, as rather, instead, exemplifying premodern, or semi-feudal, institutions, turns out to be eminently capitalistic, from the standpoint of investments, markets, profits, if still not on a plane with industry and agriculture in the North. But that per se is reason enough for fighting the Civil War (thank you Charles Beard), as working toward a more unified capitalist system of production and exchange, with the commensurate infusion of racism throughout the nation, the fuller popularization of exploitation, and the confirmed supremacy of the national government free now to address the needs and problems of a business civilization. The Civil War now opens not closes a chapter in the continuous stabilization, concentration, expansion of American capitalism, with the Great Railway Strike of 1877 a preview of labor suppression to follow, the Haymarket Affair of 1886 adding radicals and radicalism to the list of undesirables, and the Pullman Strike (Lockout) of 1894, all as highlights attempting to snuff out the lights of radicalism. Labor is by no means totally beaten down as the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, but from TR through Hoover, Wilson a standout performer, it has taken its licks, withdrawn more into itself, typified by Gompers' leadership of class accommodation, not class struggle, and seeking, as in the building trades, a respectability, akin to 100% Americanism, nullifying its radical potential in the process.

Turning, then, to Wilson, one must be reminded of two things, first, that Theodore Roosevelt before him had already brought to greater perfection the antiradical agenda in US history, pace Chris's locus of attention, and second, Wilson did greater damage to radicalism than generally viewed, suppression being the excrescence of a policy of government-business interpenetration which solidified capitalism under State protection (the euphemism, "regulation," turning out to be on behalf of the interests to be regulated, anticompetitive in nature to facilitate monopolism and turn the business community still more in the direction of foreign trade than did even TR). Wilson "improved" on Roosevelt, the Battleship Navy, Panama, overseas markets, in foreign policy, through a framework of liberal internationalism that Gordon Levin brilliantly explored in his *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics*, a course steering between traditional imperialism and revolutionary socialism, between Germany and Russia, with the tilt of greater opposition to the latter, with the Siberian Intervention, which Levin correctly sees as the inception of the Cold War lasting to this day. As for domestic policy, TR again serves as precedent (even before, we see the Interstate Commerce Commission), beating Wilson to the interpenetration-punch with his Bureau of Corporations, signaling and signifying the co-partnership of government and the House of Morgan ostensibly for regulating the banking system, and the Hepburn Act, ditto for railroads.

But, yes, Wilson deserves "credit" as more than the continuation of TR, for in key areas of the economy, regulation dwarfs in importance the suppression of labor and radicalism in defining the structural and political climate for the decline of an American Left, the levers of power now completely centered in the advancing stage of corporate and financial capitalism. Notably, the Federal Reserve System practically mandated the centralization of banking under government auspices, and the Federal Trade Commission did the same for business, resulting in the creation of the domestic foundations of monopoly capital preparatory to unilateral global ascendancy. By the 1920s labor had internalized Americanism to the hilt, the AFL ceasing to be, if it ever was, a

progressive social force, so that unions, a critical component of radicalism, ceased to function as a challenge to capitalism. Did the New Deal change the basic setting of Reaction? This is for me the basic question, the answer to which puts the decline of American radicalism into historical perspective. Chris rightly pointed out that FDR boasted he had saved capitalism, yet for a brief interlude, grounded in havoc of human suffering in the Great Depression, saving capitalism had a temporary democratizing effect, which I believe Roosevelt had recognized and intended.

This was more than subterfuge or deception. On the one hand, unquestionably the National Recovery Administration (see Sidney Fine's splendid work on the automobile industry under the NRA) strengthened monopolization through the code authorities—TR's Bureau of Corporations updated under Hugh Johnson to bear a striking similarity to Mussolini's corporatist measures and Nazi-organized business "fronts," a perhaps too easily-forgotten aspect of the New Deal having proto-fascist structural consequences, yet did not dominate over nor erase the other and I think more encompassing aspect of the New Deal, the genuine reaching out to the poor, the attack on unemployment, the blossoming of political and cultural radicalism, and, in the Wagner Act, encouragement of labor to organize, with the rise of the CIO (through its efforts as well, as in the Sit-Down Strikes) the militant alternative to the craft-oriented AFL. By the end of the 1930s, this was a different ballgame, at least it seemed, for the determination of America's future. Yet, war intervened, and as we see with A. Mitchell Palmer's contrived Red Scare during and following World War I, the Second World War and more particularly its aftermath saw the widening of social tensions, the rollback of labor's gains, loyalty oaths, the purging of dissent in unions and the universities, translated into an all-embracing McCarthyism, itself the symbol for a wave of anticommunism (McCarthy a logical progression from Palmer, with Martin Dies and HUAC somewhere in between) designed and intended to bludgeon working people to patriotic submission in business dominance and foreign military expansion, and therefore the historical suffocation of radicalism, a plateau reached by, say, 1960 representing not only a repudiation of societal gains made in the New Deal, but also (McCarthyism here perhaps a pivotal point) the closing of the borders of the American mind.

From Kennedy to Obama (Democratic bookends to bipartisan corporate hegemony and proto-fascist policies of aggression and counterrevolution) the grand march of militarized advanced-capitalism has continued, labor and radicalism battered in war's aftermath now—with Kennedy-Johnson as political-structural take-off—internalizing Social Patriotism (the Vietnam war as the convenient midwife for ideological closure) as a boa-constrictor stranglehold on free thought. Nothing in today's presidential contest surprises me, including the bold consensus operating in both parties for counterterrorism as the next stage for, or refinement of, anticommunism, as code for further submission to the privatization of human consciousness, public property, and Nature itself, and globalization as the medium and mechanism for undisputed American world supremacy, amply supported by a universalized US military presence and power, from bases to trade agreements, to alliance systems and joint maneuvers with "friends and allies," to foreign aid embodied in weaponry, training, and advisors, to the manipulation of international bodies starting with the IMF and World Bank, to, finally, though the list might continue ad nauseam, an alacrity to proceed with covert action and regime change to keep the pot boiling at home and punish dissenting forces from US suzerainty (yet still interfering in internal affairs) abroad—all leading to the knuckling under, the overawing, of the American public, especially its labor and radical elements.

The Wilsonian Ideal, however, may prove decisive for the ideological kneecapping of labor and radicals, a stimulus in the last analysis for false consciousness in which purported opposition to the Right (Germany/traditional imperialism) provided incentive and license for, and appeared to necessitate, an anti-Left position of equal if not greater strength, resulting in a Centrism as the expression of the status quo of corporate monopoly capitalism, assuredly a false centrism which contains the existing structure of wealth and power and its militarized accompaniment gained in the present-day at the expense of the Left and to policy makers an almost nonexistent Right. Projecting ahead, we find World War II Centrism to be in opposition to the Axis Powers while simultaneously (as in delaying the opening of a Second Front, the use of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki before the Soviet Union entered the Pacific war establishing claims to the occupation of Japan, and curtailing guerrilla and/or Marxist forces in China, Greece, etc.) planning to contain Russia and even develop a slew of policies aimed at the political-economic subordination of our own allies. Centrism, then, was/is a hoax, a stalking horse for American capitalism internationally, while at home a certification of Exceptionalism and democracy in which radicalism has no place, economic and military power is used only for humane purposes, and the Right is avidly portrayed as by definition the true freedom fighters because of their assault on the Left, from Chiang Kai-shek to Pinochet to Sisi and at many points in-between.

To conclude, my segment with Gary (I don't have a transcript, and my memory is notoriously bad) continued the discussion of the decline of American radicalism in which I emphasized the historical structuralization of repression, all points on the capitalist compass working toward the breakdown of independent volition so that, as reflected in the consistent shift rightward, one finds the internalization of values propelled from the top downward, i.e., radiating from the centers of power AND from the very nature of the political economy. One reason I place less stock in specific sources of repression, e.g., the Patriot Act, is because capitalism itself qua system manufactures repression as the condition of its existence. Structure (as in hierarchy), politics (as in fundamental agreement on the authority of upper groups), and culture (as in the cleansing of ideas to conform to a scripted ideology of closure, excluding class consciousness as demeaning to the individual) all three converge on the inculcation of loyalty to the System and its supposed betters as the natural leaders, and all three legitimate a political culture grounded in the property right as divine gospel, in both cases resulting in a vacuum of moral authority to be filled by drone assassination and whatever else cunning, devious minds contrive to ensure the continuation (quite literally) of business-as-usual, a behavioral syndrome busily engaged in fleeing from the penitentiary and/or war-crimes tribunals. Only, the culprits never seem to get caught, and instead get elected to higher office or occupy a corner suite at Morgan, Chase.

DECEMBER 21, 2015

### **Structural Repression: America's "Soft"-Fascism**

Collective absorption into a rotting system may appear volitional, therefore consensus, but in fact represents structural fascism, an historically evolving societal formation and framework of power in which all reference to peace, justice, economic and cultural democratization has been weakened if not eliminated from consciousness through a pounding, reinforced assertion and affirmation of CAPITALISM. Structural because seemingly self-evident and painless, while in reality the process of what amounts to ideological acculturation takes on a universal suffocative effect through every

available means of manipulation/compulsion, from a patriotism generated by and associated with war to everyday symbols of national pride drumming home the theme of exceptionalism. The American, much as Steig's famous New Yorker cartoon of the individual trapped in his/her psychoanalytical cubicle muttering "People are no damn good," is boxed-in to a narrow epistemological space of adherence to total passivity, conformity, loyalty. Force is not ruled out to achieve political-ideological acquiescence in America, for much as in the way Marx describes the stage of primitive accumulation in *Das Capital*, the enclosure movement in seventeenth-century England (a superb example of structural repression), America has had its analogous situation of primitive accumulation in the bloody suppression of the labor movement, say, 1877-1938, from the railway strikes of the first bloody era, to the sit-down strikes of the New Deal, with countless local skirmishes in between: a formative context of state militias, government troops, and Pinkertons pressing down on working people to ensure unions (when permitted) would be safe (the Nazi parallel, soldiers-in-industry) and radicalism would be declared unacceptable and un-American.

Here we are, the close of 2015, after more than two centuries of the unquestioned ascendancy of capitalism, to all intents, an exclusively capitalist polity, the principal institutions of the social order, particularly government and the military, functioning solely on its behalf, to the point in which capitalism itself disappears within, and is identified as, the society's way of life. Hardness is the preparatory stage to softness, America as the macrocosm of Skinner's box conditioning the behavior of rats. We are rats dressed in the finery of a free people, dedicated however to stripping those of whom we disapprove of their finery (i.e., dignity as human beings) so as to become rats and no more—a de-legitimation of all things contrary to US demands, values, and expectations. Only some are coming to recognize that what we do to others establishes the precedent for doing the same to ourselves, chickens coming home to roost, as in the determined effort to cheapen labor while strengthening the economic-social bonds of upper groups to act in concert as a cohesive ruling group for the perversion of democracy and the negation of the social welfare.

It is all so simple and straightforward, a normalization of repression as translated somehow, via consumerism, sport, popular culture, into freedom, notwithstanding the narrow boundaries for its expression. Consider the presidential debates currently underway, in which the only thing distinguishing the parties is tone, not substance, a matter-of-fact acceptance of imperialism as America's right, and refusal to stare into the abyss of America's moral emptiness when it comes to employment, a living wage, medical benefits, the state of quality education for every child and opportunities to expand from there, all sacrificed to presumed exigencies of the Garrison State, a massive military budget destroying the vitals of civilized society. Militarization, too, is normalized as the nation's condition of existence, militarism the proudly proclaimed yet at the same time hidden motivating spirit because couched in the rhetoric of survival, righteousness, duty to God and country (a neatly-tied bundle of Exceptionalism). Barrington Moore's Harvard lectures on political sociology referenced what he termed "narcotization," the appeal of bread-and-circuses to keep the populace tractable, an idea not unlike Herbert Marcuse's, stated in, I believe, the epilogue to *Reason and Revolution*, the absorption of society's negativity, perhaps an Hegelian way of saying, all systems go in curtailing/destroying opposition to the System.

Soft Fascism, quotation marks removed because we have become reconciled to our condition of self-repression, even to the point of praising it Panglossian-fashion as the best of all possible worlds. How comforting to know that we can stare eyeball-to-eyeball with Putin and Xi in light of

our immense nuclear arsenal, and if the Conflagration comes, so be it, we have always been right from the start! The morality of profound immorality, the reliance on force to achieve the Nirvana of ultimate peace—as in the collective death wish of a failed social order, returning us to my starting point: collective absorption into a rotting system. Look at those who represent “America’s finest” in the political arena, jackals of despair who mouth platitudes of strength. Last night’s Democratic debate (Dec. 18), the supposed opposition to all that Republicans hold dear, reflected instead a not-so-pale carbon copy of the latter’s agenda, focused on terrorism as the magic bullet to hold up in order to frighten the American people, to subdue and quell all resistance to continued intervention abroad, similarly, alternative ways of thinking, governing, living, at home. Ironically, this psychological-ideological message hammered home incessantly is becoming increasingly unnecessary, the Pavlovian response having already been validated.

A Clinton-Trump presidential election in 2016 would represent rock-bottom in the confirmation of America’s desire for continued unilateral global supremacy, a venture by both candidates to the precipice of total war for the sake of national honor (i.e., advanced-capitalist development). The US is largely responsible for the manufacture of terrorism through successive interventions in the Muslim world, only then to use terrorism as an ideological crutch for mounting universal political-economic expansion. The ultimate referent here is American capitalism, on which we can be sure Trump looks with favor, and, in the Democratic debate, we find Clinton using phony rhetoric to mask her own strong commitment to capitalism; for when asked, “Should corporate America love Hillary Clinton?”, she replied, “I want to be the president for the struggling, the striving and the successful”—can’t be done, when the successful are responsible for conditions creating the struggling. Hillary, above class, above party, desperately wanting to be loved by everyone as the formula for class reconciliation, the status quo, and the rule of upper groups. A close relation to Wall Street, clearly on a par with that of Trump, which despite his wealth may view him as unstable and unpredictable, provides her with the bridge for the execution of an aggressive military-foreign policy: little to choose between the two front-running candidates.

The politicization of terrorism by both parties brings McCarthyism up-to-date as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americanism. We know ourselves by whom we hate, and who hates us. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia have perhaps never been so prevalent and popular in the American psyche than now, Muslims today in the minds of Americans becoming the equivalent of Jews in the minds of Germans in the 1930s—the demiurge of extermination lying just below the surface of political discourse. From Cruz’s remarks on carpet-bombing to the remainder of the candidates of both parties, we see haste in showing who is fairest (i.e., toughest) of them all in fighting terrorism, a muscular appeal to the public quavering in fear. Patrick Healy, in his New York Times article, “Bernie Sanders Falls Behind in a Race Centered on Security,” (Dec. 19), does not exaggerate in writing, “Americans are more anxious about terrorism than income inequality. They want the government to target the Islamic State more than Wall Street executives and health insurers. All of this plays to Mrs. Clinton’s strengths—not only as a hawkish former secretary of state but also as a savvy politician who follows the public mood.” I briefly alluded to America’s race to the bottom, fear of terrorism greasing the wheels, and one can expect the other candidates, as in the Democratic debate and the Republic roster, to follow suit in a race to catch up or sprint to a glorious finish. The curtain descends on false consciousness, America’s corporate-financial elite smiling in the wings.

DECEMBER 24, 2015

### **Glad Tidings: To Us, a Fate Is Given**

2016 beckons, America burrowing down into political Hell, its constitutional vestiges of freedom neglected and all but shredded, as the presidential campaign moves to a second stage, the first being to weed out and eliminate substantive disagreements between the parties over imperialism, unilateral global dominance, and their home-front complement, xenophobia and ethnocentrism. Whence the source of this structural-ideological Reaction? My nominee is an advanced stage of capitalist development in America senile whose inner workings have created widespread wealth-status-power discrepancies in the domestic context then projected outward through militarism and market-investment expansion as its systemic driving force to preserve a degree of cohesion in the polity, economy, and world position of the US. America is nothing if not overly-synchronized, all three interrelated, mutually dependent, polity shaking down from the mid-19th century into a hierarchical structure, the more class-ridden as it proclaims its own classlessness, economy, reciprocally entwined with class structure, acting as a complement of hierarchy through producing extreme wealth concentration and endemic under-consumption and unemployment among the laboring classes, finally, world position, the object of military-political-ideological striving for power and hoped-for corrective to a congealed capitalism, its hardening arteries premonitorily signaling economic breakdown and depression.

America conceives itself in a life-and-death struggle for survival, hence renewed confrontation (add China to Russia, as the major adversaries) beckoning a New Cold War, hence the tensions in the American mind-set taking the form of a pervasive fear-hysteria over terrorism, the anti-immigrant feeling stoking sub-rosa racialism and/or mistakenly implied radicalism, and a drive for the cleansing spirit of patriotism. Ironically, being on top of the global heap instills anxieties about becoming displaced, which is taken to be the struggle for survival. Exceptionalism gives rise to a paranoia over displacement, thereby driving America further into the rock-bottom of political Hell, present happenings, e.g., drone assassination, covert action, regime change, the war-criminal activities of servicemembers, recently come to light, each typifies the controlled sadism commensurate with maintaining pride of place in the international system and together pointing to an aforementioned senility characteristic of declining Empires.

Santa's sled is laden with lethal weaponry of death. It doesn't have to be this way, Christmas itself even fully secularized has the potential for affirming life through showing consideration for others, particularly the weak and disadvantaged among us, concretely taking the form of a social transformation equalitarian in spirit, character, and condition. But that appears beyond our ken, where hegemony trumps harmony and peace, capitalist social organization with its numerically tiny ruling group trumps commonwealth (savor the word, as the wealth shared in common, including its environmental as well as social-justice significance!), where contempt for privacy via NSA massive surveillance trumps respect for the individual's freedom of thought, political security, and human dignity, and where heavy-handed consumerism trumps a life of the mind and sense of uncluttered purpose. Accordingly, the synchronization is now complete, added to polity, economy, world position, we see war, intervention, and the debasement of the human being into a fear-struck, hate-ridden, agent of destruction aimed at all coming within our purview, perhaps most of all, ourselves.

Too pessimistic for the Holiday Season? Tell that to Obama, who has finessed America into a war-provoking posture under liberal auspices (liberal as, not only resistance to, with intention of

destroying, radicalism, in truth, its historical function, but liberal also as the liberalization of proto-fascism, to give the State internal powers of repression, external powers of militarized expansion, and sublime dedication to the fortunes of capitalism itself, through what I have been describing in these pages as the interpenetration of business and government for the promotion of monopolistic self-regulation and greater wealth-concentration)—Obama frankly my villain du jour, more so than Clinton and Trump, because he has dressed a socially inhumane system to which his own measures have contributed mightily with a patina of tarnished gold to cover over the demise of whatever democracy in America remained, both at home and abroad. Wall Street may be an overworked symbol which, worse, has led to simplistic thinking and the consequent remedies affecting the American structure of power, but it will do in a pinch until we take the measure of capitalism's systemic foundations in generating prodigious wealth and ramifying, octopus-like arms reaching into, and corrupting, the heart of the nation's identity as a free people. Morgan, Chase is free, Monsanto is free, the new genre of US arithmetic is free, i.e., billionaires emerging from myriad dung heaps of finance and industry, yet the average Joe or Jane Doakes, in direct correspondence, is NOT free, partly through his/her fault in allowing such a system to arise and cheering it on by endorsing the Obamas, Clintons, Trumps, of this (unseemly) world, but beyond their, really our, passivity, there is a structure of power grinding on, taking full command of what might politely be termed the sources of knowledge and organs of opinion-formation, directed to a fast-enclosing social order. What is to be done?

DECEMBER 25, 2015

### **Hitlerian Proportions: US Foreign Policy and NATO Expansion**

Seldom have I found so cogent and morally bracing geopolitical analysis than in Gary Leupp's CounterPunch article, *NATO: Seeking Russia's Destruction Since 1949*, (Dec. 25-27), timely in that discussing contemporary international politics in light of the changing world structure, both developments defining a context, 65-plus years in the making, holding the promise of a massive global confrontation, and, even if limited to initial nuclear exchanges and confined to less than apocalyptic dimensions, still wreaking destruction and suffering which intensifies all the other problems confronting humankind. Yet we slumber in our myopic address of issues—understandably compelling to those of us so engaged, notably, global warming, environmental rapine, massive surveillance, structurally- and culturally-bound racism, the widening domestic cleavages of wealth and power—all of which vanish (I should say, evaporate, much as does the human being targeted by a drone) if worse comes to worse. Climate change, not to worry; fracking and devastation of primal forests, ditto; clamping down on dissent, privacy, freedom of association, the same; inequality and discrimination, as night follows day; financial-industrial consolidation and concentration, apple pie, should World War III materialize, with no-one left to mourn the consequences, but even short of that, as now, each of these destructive aspects of present-day decision-making merely accelerates such trends because the permanent-war doctrine operable in ideologically-obsessed government circles takes priority over problems which require solving if, ultimately, global catastrophe of a different but parallel kind is not to happen. In fact, the two are joined, whether war or its near-suicidal preparation, democracy and freedom become kicked into the dustbin of history.

Let's assume the avoidance of total war (for the sake of analysis, if not of historical truth)—Keynes's aphorism, we'll all be dead in the long run, a perceptive if unintentional diagnosis of the



results of national policy and systemic expansion—so as to focus on the situation at hand, what one finds is that the US has one-sidedly mounted a global war of dominance (we term it a Cold War, as if to imply America and Russia are equally involved, the former, defensively, the latter, menacing offensively), Russia always the aggressor, fictionalizing the postwar setting to promote the reification of anticommunism as a means of normalizing imperialism, energizing a social climate hostile to labor rights and civil rights, and fomenting an aggressive mental-set as directed to war as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Within five years following the war, the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine, the organization of NATO, support of the Kuomintang in China, and transforming the UN into an anti-Soviet coalition, all were symptomatic of America's unilateral quest for supervising the globalization of capitalism on its own terms and to its own advantage. By 1950, the die had been cast, as though a deterministic path to the present, administrations one after the other in cumulative succession regardless of party bifurcating world order that, via military means and internal subversion, societal-ideological tensions could be used to cover the market-and-investment dynamics of US monopoly-capitalist development. But there was nothing actually deterministic about it, and rather the steady procession toward full-throttle expansion feeding on itself.

I say Hitlerian proportions not to indicate size and scope, but the transmogrifying energies to be applied at home and abroad. Every intervention, every stimulus to ideological hysteria, every deposing of a democratic leader, whether in Central America or Iran, still in the early stages of the Cold War (Vietnam signifying a point of no return in America's fascistic vision and version of Exceptionalism, as code for unrestrained/uninhibited right to achieve world counterrevolution), and later, beyond regime change and covert action, every strategic ploy to form either trade or military alliances, with the growing turning of attention to China and the Far East, every use of false-flag operations, on and on, the US, whether at State or Defense, the CIA, Treasury, right up to the Oval Office, Government had become a permanent Situation Room, the effect of all this to alter domestic society to unrecognizable lengths as compared, say, with the New Deal years. Diplomacy was replaced by demonization, rational self-interest by an hegemonic thirst bordering on bloodlust. Hillary has dislodged all-comers as the voice of responsible genocidal practice, i.e., "responsible," also like Obama, because couching domestic repression and foreign war in the seemingly moderate language of liberalism.

NATO is more or less the stalking horse for US global ambitions, its policy of active recruitment, sending out applications for membership at a rate difficult to keep up with, having one purpose, encirclement of Russia, preparatory to its dismemberment, itself prerequisite to all-out assault on China along similar lines, Japan a willing partner in the enterprise. Exceptionalism, time to move over on the ideological pedestal, to make way for Invincibility as a motivating spirit which guides American actions. We see therefore escalation in the historical process of seeking world dominance, a more dangerous Cold War than perhaps ever. (To be accurate, strike "perhaps"). This is a psychological nightmare in the making, projection becoming increasingly important to the outcome: What America says about Russia is a projection of our own aggressive beliefs and plans onto that country (also China). More than a conjuring act, America's addiction to a threat of Evil is very real, grounded in an habitual ethnocentrism which divides the world in terms of We and They, those for us, those against us, an outlook both fueling and fueled by hostility to labor, class as an organizing social principle, and equality, and from a generalized antiradicalism finding expression also today in counterterrorism, a love-relationship to guns, and xenophobic venom toward the immigrant.

It is easy to blame “Neocons” for our troubles (the term is a slur on traditional conservatism, of which America has seen little in its history, Burke probably pilloried if all of his ideas were taken into account)—why not call them what they are, petit fascists? Not the legions of think-tank, NGO, and Senate advocates for war, national honor, etc., prove decisive here, but America qua America has shown itself to be integrally flawed, if peace, social justice, and respect for human dignity be our guiding standard. Even in the short-term context, aid to forces that evolved into Islamic extremists in Afghanistan, in order to counter Russia’s efforts to stabilize the Kabul government in the 1980s, doesn’t get at the immediate global turmoil, for before that the uncritical support of Israel in its project of ethnic cleansing and territorial expansion could not but arouse Muslim anger—the commingling of anticommunism and counterterrorism allowing the US to show the flag, thereby enlarging the war theater to make the Middle East integral to the confrontation with Russia and China. The pieces are falling into place, the 2016 presidential election given the probable candidates an exercise in more of the same: a march to the precipice.

DECEMBER 29, 2015

### **Israel Disgraces Judaism: Militarism + Orthodoxy = Authoritarian Mindset**

Where else in the world is Occupation given a free pass by the global community? Why? Lingering guilt over the Holocaust? Geopolitical reality, in which the US has established a wedge of support for its never-ending confrontation with Russia and China? Oil politics run amuck, where Middle East dominance is a prerequisite for America’s hegemonic plans and aspirations? Or merely, the minutia of power-considerations, from, e.g., AIPAC lobbying to relentless media iteration of a bastion of freedom standing valiantly against the twin evils of Arab nationalism (read, Muslim extremism) and the still-communistic menace of Russia and China (a distorted conjuring of Stalin and Mao)? Take your pick, probably all of the foregoing, for allowing Israel to drop below the moral radar and emerge scot-free as a member of the international community in good standing. And no doubt, other factors I’ve omitted, as in the skillful use of charging opponents, including Jews, with the tar brush of anti-Semitism.

Ganugh, enough already. Judaism is precious to the history of freedom, inscribed in the sublime thoughts of Torah, where persecution had the effect of chastening the ancient Hebrews to welcome and respect the stranger and to feel a special obligation to uphold moral standards through living exemplary lives. This has come down until recent times as a mandate, whether secular or religious, to amplify the gifts of civilization for all humankind as in the contributions made to philosophy, literature, painting, and music—a tangible presence on the world scene that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, could but anger the forces of totalitarianism and mediocrity and lead directly to the Evil of the Holocaust itself. World Jewry paid the penalty for, by its conduct and values, opposing the retrograde forces spawned by the difficulties attendant on the industrial transformation, on which fascism thrived: a manure pile of resentments, conspiracy theory, fears of democratization, the plebeian accommodation to monopoly capitalism as though identifying with The Leadership and with conquest would restore meaning to life.

Because Jews had been, perhaps from time immemorial, the proverbial scapegoat, made their targeting easier, but for that very reason, made their urge toward learning, their enlistment in progressive causes, the more defining and vital to their own lives. Now, I’m saddened, deeply

saddened, to write, this is passing away in the mistaken identification with Israel as the source of Jewish essentialness. It is NOT. There is no warrant in Torah for the merciless beating down of an indigenous population whose only “crime” has been inhabitancy of a land the conqueror has claimed—if not a distortion of Zionism, where all could live in peace and harmony, then grounds for exposing Zionism from the start as unwarranted aggression and contrary to the spirit of Jewish cosmopolitanism and the godliness of all human beings. Today, Israel remains on a decades-long rampage of inflicting deprivation and humiliation on the Palestinian people, while inflicting the poisons of hatred and intolerance on itself. We read in today’s paper the Knesset is considering legislation on curbing the influence of NGOs, the fine print being their not our NGOs, the “their” the few peace groups remaining in Israeli society, along with the members wearing identifying symbols in the Knesset (obvious shades of Nazism), while also today Israel is demanding Brazil accept Dan Dayan, archetypal militant settler in the Occupied Territories, as its ambassador to that country.

But today is not different from yesterday, the ever-steady encroachment on the rights of Palestinians, advanced weaponry vs. knives and can openers, the bombardments of areas densely-filled with ordinary families (and hospitals, water-treatment plants, etc.) that we witnessed in Gaza, the checkpoints, the barbed wire, and behind the Israeli soldier’s sunglasses the smugness, contemptuousness, disdain for human life, like controlling so much cattle to market, or a throwback to Nazis herded Jews at bayonet point into the waiting trains for the crematoria. Every Jew who died in the concentration camp and death chamber during World War II is a silent refutation of current Israeli practice; they did not die to confer license on oppressors, or to legitimize oppression. They died, yes, as martyrs, they died as giving testimony to the world of their belief in freedom and for many their devotion to God.

Israel invokes God via the Jewish State as the new Golden Calf, to be worshipped as the guardian of mayhem and murder. Every Palestinian thrown off the land, stomped under foot, wears the face of a Jew herded into the ovens. And Israelis are blind to their own actions, the commission of atrocities, as though having somehow (call it “introjection”) internalized the unspeakable crimes committed against Jews of a previous generation. What is to be done? Can the now-apparent authoritarianism, fast assuming totalitarian proportions, be reversed? I don’t know. I do know, however, the pride I can take in the Judaism that I learned about and experienced in an earlier time. Now somewhat older, I can remember the solidarity expressed between whites and blacks in which Jews were an important part of the civil rights struggle (of which I was privileged to be a foot soldier). I can remember the disproportionate role of Jews in radicalism and the labor movement, and personally claiming Paul Robeson as one of our own. Radicalism is dying in America; it is probably already dead, long buried, and openly vilified in Israel. The two are somehow related, as Israel has absorbed to itself what had been the legacy of American Jewry, only to negate it and leave it empty. My title above, “Israel Disgraces Judaism,” in reality does not go far enough, for it may also be responsible for its decline as a world religion solicitous of the care of all who are persecuted and deprived of their humanity. It therefore not only disgraces Judaism, it negates it, a transmogrification of beauty into ugliness which few among us will have the courage to withstand.

JANUARY 1, 2016

## **Dynamics of False Consciousness: America Today**

Class is integral to capitalism, the former its defining structure, the latter the directed purpose of a societal-historical process of wealth concentration whose intended purpose is systemic inequality. To legitimize this historical formation over time, given its inherent and myriad features of domination, requires persistent, sustaining, effective doses of false consciousness transmitted downward through the social order in the form of patriotism, diversions and distractions, and the invitation to identify with war (hegemony) and expansion (imperialism). This formula of Exceptionalism, the ideological cover for America's special brand of capitalism, has worked in domestic and international politics through formal and informal social control at home and a pattern of aggressive, largely unilateral, combat, intervention, and confrontation in foreign affairs: the full blossoming of capitalist development as a counterrevolutionary force arresting trends toward and possibilities of global democratization, anathema to capitalism and America both.

I say "anathema" because what I am describing did not occur overnight, or even following the Second World War, at which point dramatic policy choices were coming into convergence, as in the squaring off of world ideological systems obstructing the universalization of capitalism led by America. Reaching the heights of power and influence in that war's aftermath then defined a still higher stage, from coalition leadership ("the free world") to exclusive hegemon calling the tune to actions to the US's advantage and on its behalf. There is nothing solely deterministic in history, nor, for that matter, foreordained by a kindly, superseding deity; yet, consecutiveness both in policy and action, rooted in systemic requirements (from the maximization of profits and the creation of surplus capital as a means to further investment, to class dynamics which ensure the security of ruling groups and their potency in decision-making at all levels of government and also ensure, the twin to surplus capital, surplus labor, by means of under-consumption via low-wages doctrine and inequitable sharing of wealth distribution) and exploitation itself.

Nothing new about this, the capitalization of chattel slavery in America, with emancipation, a precursor to a fully elaborated system of wage labor now articulated, by slavery's removal, as part of the uniform growth of specifically modern institutions of law and economics, property-centered, with slavery no longer a structural impediment: capitalism as a runaway locomotive on a single track. But even before plantation slavery had become a decisive factor in the US political economy, we see in the very formation of America the weakening if not abandonment of feudalism as a European relic unsuited for transplanting in the New World, thereby leaving capitalism a clear field unencumbered by political-social restraints to fill out the structural and ideological vacuum created by migration. Purist capitalism from take-off to, now, landing, so historically defined as even to subsume slavery, a premodern formation, ultimately within its capacious maw (yes, that of a voracious carnivore). There were no exceptions allowed, labor, from the start of industrialism, subjected to strikebreaking and state-sponsored violence, and in agriculture, serfdom of a peculiarly capitalist kind, with sharecropping and debt peonage, all in all then, the historical-structural foreclosure of ALTERNATIVES to capitalism, a behemoth which assumed total proportions in molding the culture and politics of society.

A capitalist polity has no need for internal dissent, if it wishes to preserve its monolithic class system. What I described above is represented not by an elite conspiracy, but the sum-total of countless decisions matter-of-factly taken whenever and wherever class prerogatives, decisions of

war and peace, trends toward consolidation and monopolization, are opposed or resisted by working people, until finally the latter have become habituated/conditioned to acceptance of the going reality as the normalization of life and of order, a framework within which exclusion from power is compensated for by membership in the club, albeit on a subordinate basis, to engage in the exploitation of others still further down the Great Chain of Being, blacks at home, along with other designated out-groups, and overseas, whether through outsourcing, market-penetration, or war, intervention, or regime change, whole nations and populations, especially peasantries victimized by their own nations' ruling groups. Thus, a never-ending exploitative sequence of power-relations founded on military strength and geopolitical considerations.

We come to today, the fruit of centuries of internal capitalist development, an unprecedented mal-distribution of wealth, a corresponding powerlessness of the mass citizenry, the intensified build-up of military power symbiotically linked to political-strategic goals of financial-industrial-commercial dominance inaugurating a stage of globalization stabilized it is hoped to perfection, as satisfying the dream of permanently freezing into place America's culminating role in world history. An immodest projection? History itself stops at the American shoreline, all else to be the fulfillment of its destiny as the Empire of One. Perhaps think of where we are, beginning a new year, not of hope but of fear, a pervasive fear of terrorism (today, an armed camp in Times Square, and other major cities coast-to-coast), a fear whose source, we dimly realize, has been the actual record of US involvement worldwide, from Cold War conflict with respect to Russia and China and the internal subversion and overthrow of progressive governments and societies, on one hand, to, particularly, intervention in the Middle East on Israel's behalf, then extending outward to Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Iran, all directions that Israel deems a threat to its own superiority and security. The Arab and Muslim nations, themselves saturated with US military bases, are expected to submit to such regional and global dictation, not realizing, on America's part, that resentment follows intervention, a seedbed for terrorism which cannot be eradicated until and unless there is a fundamental change in American policy—and even then the whiff of blowback will remain in the air.

2016 will not usher in a year of peace and freedom. America is too committed, by bipartisan agreement, to a course of sustained aggrandizement, the threat of terror seemingly confirming the need for pressing forward, a domestic climate of narrowing social goals of concentration of wealth and power accompanied by hostility to dissent, a foreign-policy context of unyielding claims to moral virtue as imperialist underpinning and, its concrete expression, demands for military and trade partnerships (TPP, the latest example) directing the world's wealth and resources to America's coffers, and that of its "friends and allies." On crucial matters, here, I hold foreign policy as determinant, there is no difference between the major parties, hence, the upcoming elections an overwhelmingly favorable plebiscite in favor of imperialism and, if need be, war. Trump and Clinton, choose your poison. An end to police racial violence, not when the shadow of ethnocentrism and xenophobia casts a centuries-old pall over the landscape of structural-ideological bigotry. Tax avoidance at the apex of American capitalism, not altered anytime soon. Spoliation of the environment, just ask Oklahoma residents this week about the fracking in their state—or the deeper contemptuous treatment of Nature through pushing to the earth's polar extremities in search of wealth, the ravaging of rain forests, similarly, and the thousand-and-one developmental and extractive schemes with no regard to future generations. Not a happy note on which to extend new year's greetings, except, between the lines, a plea to us all to RESIST.

JANUARY 5, 2016

**Legacy Building = Deceit + Chicanery**



The Obama record: copious liberal (i.e., negation of progressive) manure-shoveling, combined with a public policy of muscular capitalist development via an unrestrained private economy of monopolism and favorable business/financial regulation and a militaristic international posture of war, intervention, regime change facilitating market expansion and hegemonic security. Not an enviable record, except to an ascending constituency representing core political-ideological proto-fascism defining the increasingly predominant American mentality: the swelling of fear as an outgrowth of massive surveillance at home, counterrevolution abroad, both dressed up as a Manichean global conflict (wholly neglecting the US role in fostering Islamic jihadism) in which counterterrorism slips over neatly into the Cold War construct of anticommunism in order to legitimize the steadily escalating confrontation with Russia and China, itself inaugurating a New Cold War possibly more dangerous than the first.

Reaction (e.g., Bush) is a known factor, while liberalism is equally pernicious because the results are the same, creating a capitalist polity of widely disparate wealth-and-power distribution that immobilizes (while perpetuating) the poor, splits working people along racial and ethnic lines, and solidifies the ranks of upper social groups (providing for inordinate control over political life and policy determination). To a greater extent than previously in peacetime, this translates as a social structure and political economy of systemic inequality promoting by necessity, to keep its growth rate and internal features intact, a sustained pattern of global aggrandizement which, reciprocally meshed with the domestic foundations of business growth, becomes the paradigm of universalized, unilateral dominance in determining an acceptable (to the US) world order. Here Obama is sufficiently proficient to advance the cause, although a neophyte when it comes to geopolitical thinking and planning, assisted by an ironclad heritage tracing back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century of the Open Door to establish political-ideological boundaries within which trade expansion underwritten by military power is de rigueur, something he always took as a given and lacked the political imagination to contest. Further assistance has come of course from an authoritative cadre of militarists, State and Treasury “experts,” think-tank regulars, university professors acting as

servants of power, together all complicitous in shaping the Grand Design, timeservers in the corporatist organization of American society including its imperialist thrust.

Obama wears ideological blinders, enabling him to put a liberal spin on policy trends verging on power-lust seemingly for its own sake, yet the disguise for a still more deadly amalgam of policy in which power is code for the totalitarian regularization of political-social relations sanctioning a militarized capitalism, itself grounded in ethnocentric/xenophobic values of hierarchy, hatred of dissent, stimulation of patriotism, in sum, command above, docility below. Entering his final year as president, he claims leadership on several fronts, each of which has been turned upside down, leading to a legacy perfectly aligned with that of his predecessors, confirming the unity of both parties on the essentials of capitalism. Government agencies plod on with little to no protection to the public; DOJ is feckless when it comes to police brutality, white-collar crime, antitrust prosecution; the Pentagon is the instrument of aggression, papered over by State and Treasury, one busily negotiating military alliances and trade partnerships (to the same end), the other enlisting, along with State, the services of the IMF and World Bank to protect American investment overseas, the stabilization of credit and currency on a global basis, and the internal arrangements of the targeted “host” countries affecting tariffs, austerity, and the extraction of natural resources; the list continues indefinitely as the normalization of hegemony, no questions asked, no answers—except for pressures and force—freely given.

Obama is therefore simply doing his job as custodian of the supposedly natural order, a cipher awaiting replacement by the next political enabler of advanced capitalism. But if that were all, it would hardly be worth discussion. From cipher to actor, whether conscious or unconscious in assuming the role, we see in foreign policy a mandatory taking of reins, exigencies of capitalism demanding nothing less. Paradoxically, the US finds itself threatened, not by communism as a world historical force (the supreme diagnosis of the unfolding Cold War, from George Kennan to Curtis Le May, in descending orders of sophistication), but by rising capitalist powers, newly minted Russia and China in that respect, as well as the EU acting as a financial-commercial bloc, and Japan, with its feudalistic corporatism. This decentralization of global capitalism is now the ultimate enemy of the US from the standpoint of its exercise of world power, with terrorism, oddly enough, a welcome intrusion because bringing about intracapitalist unity in fighting this threat—a temporary respite, arresting internecine competition while diverting the attention of the masses, particularly in America, from geopolitical tensions engendered by economic rivalry.

I am not here diagramming a Marxist scenario of Nirvana, the collapse of capitalism as a world system, merely instead, what I take to be the US caught in its own destructive framework as the other global powers, because similarly inclined, rather than transcending capitalism altogether for socialism, experience their own capitalist difficulties of underconsumption, falling rates of profit, the need for social control of the masses to smother discontent, thus a tightly organized society locked into struggling performance and further conflict. If anything, Marx missed the boat on the systemic evolutionary progression of human betterment, underestimating just how resourceful capitalism can be, fortified by militarism, the (false) promises of consumerism, and a command structure habituating the masses to a state of acquiescence. In this light, terrorism keeps the people in line, even to the extent of distrusting each other, and then methodically dispatched until a new scapegoat can be suitably demonized and vanquished. This becomes, as the condition of capitalist survival, a never-ending process of scapegoating, accompanied by an equally never-ending process

of war and intervention, lest, still keeping capitalist rivals in their place, radicalism breaks out of its narcotic state and resumes class struggle, reviving Marx from his ideological slumber.

For now, Obama has a full (counterrevolutionary) plate, North Africa being the latest in a series of testing the waters for areas of vulnerability in establishing the American Imperium. This is in the nature of marginalia, however, because Russia and China occupy American policy makers' primary attention, his own near-obsession with the US domination of Asia, carrying Pentagon and State with him, an important thread of his legacy-construction. India may be the forgotten major player in the region, a potential obstacle to running roughshod in the area as a whole. Russia, meanwhile, awaits a "pivot" of its own, assuming America can build a military edifice sufficient to the task, the present conflict in Syria and the Middle East an obvious flash point in allowing the US to move more "assets"—thank you, Pentagon jargon—to Russia's borders as it is also doing in the Pacific. By moving up the State of the Union address by two weeks, Obama is displaying his commander-in-chief image, a firm, resolute leader, protector of the Homeland, which signifies: more power to the banks and corporations, less tolerance of dissent, a society poised for the next round of global conquest. Much else is cast by the wayside, from the social safety net to the environment, a toning-up for warlike prowess. Let the perpetrated hoax of a democratic society continue, the screws on the other hand tightening rapidly on its opposite, authentic political-social democracy.

JANUARY 6, 2016

### **Gun Violence: Obama's Best Shot**



Obama's best shot is pathetic—and wholly to be expected. For what is gun violence, but the miniaturization of US foreign policy combined with ages-old treatment of the human being as a commodity under capitalism? That is, human life is cheap, whether as the target of drone assassination (Obama) or the contemptuous regard for working people, particularly people of color, in US political-labor history. Today America is the mirror image of its international and domestic barbarism: how expect the sacredness of human life when the societal context glorifies deeds of



violence, including the serial raping of the environment. Capitalism teaches antagonism, power, combativeness; contemporary American politics, both parties together, synchronized, on war, intervention, duplicitous merchandising, glorification of wealth, a stew of ruthless egotism enlarged to Cyclopean proportions consistently vented as aggression licensed by religion through dichotomization of social relations into the strong and the weak. Guns merely validate and carry to a logical conclusion the stifled hatred/fear/mistrust bred in the bones of this historical social order. Collective extermination has been America's watchword, whether the Plains Indians in the Middle West, railroad strikers in 1877 at the hands of Pinkertons and militias, Bonus Marchers on the Anacostia Flats, Douglas MacArthur looking on, or the village of My Lai in Vietnam—a blood-stained record every schoolchild is encouraged to take pride in. Excessive patriotism = gun violence, or rather, subliminally justifies gun violence: ask any NRA member; better yet, the average American, as gun sales blow through the roof.

Wiseacres may see guns as an in-depth manifestation of penis envy, but why invoke Freudian psychology when there are evident sources for the shaping of the American personality formation. In 1950, Theodor Adorno et. al. called it The Authoritarian Personality, a polite, overly-generous designation for the fascist mindset (and indeed, the authors used what they termed the f-scale to refine the thematic content of such a mindset). Fascism is alive and well, now in southeastern Oregon, but also the mayoral office in Chicago, the Situation Room in the White House, and countless points in-between, in every counting house like Goldman Sachs or Morgan Chase to every defense contractor like Boeing, and the list goes on! Is there still an honest buck to be made out there? Has Monsanto seen the light? Why, then, expect anyone else to behave differently, beginning with Obama himself? Stand in my way—bang. Challenge my uniform—bang. Look a bit out of the ordinary (what in my day was called scuzzy)—bang. Bang, the answer to everything, a society fast draining of affect, except that which reinforces hatred and fear of difference.

Gun holders were once associated in the popular mind with gangsters and thugs, now with generals, Rotarians, and other good, wholesome citizens, the common denominator among them being, guns transformed the individual into a wielder of power—and power is the basic coinage of the realm, that which allows one to push another around or reduce that person to subservience, the Other to be confronted by the mental shorthand, what's in it for me? Guns confirm the existence and pervasive state of ALIENATION, human separation the rule, violence a life force, not to bridge, but destroy, connectedness, a cheapening of others to repel thoughts of our own desolation and emptiness. Yes, Obama, the right one to personify and presumably wield power over us (for he is truly a fake, the artful dodger as a consolidated ruling group is taking form and cohesion to that end, no longer as in Junker Germany the marriage of Iron and Rye, and instead here the marriage of Wealth and the Military), for as president he has finessed every important issue, including gun violence, widening the already existing social vacuum, and thus allowing, even enabling, crypto-fascist forces to fill in its content. Gun violence will not be diminished until the legitimated violence (Barrington Moore's emphasis, in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, published 50 years ago, and very much relevant for our time) of business and government finally ceases. Nations often practice legitimated violence on each other through policies of systematic starvation, and more generally for the US at the point of a gun. What legitimates violence is Authority, it is all so nice and legal, it emanates from above, literally and figuratively like drone assassination. No-one to blame, the majesty of the law, in which case Obama by his recommendations does not scratch the surface.

Gun control is a misnomer, although all that the ideological traffic will bear in the year of our Lord 2016, because what is “controlled” is not supply, and much less of course the underlying disposition to violence in the nation at large, but only the pro forma observance of background checks and, in a few states, prohibitions on concealed weapons. Frills and flounces to make liberals feel good, as they, among the rest, actively plan and execute policies of political murder on the Other, stripped of human identity, penalized because standing in the way of (business-financial) progress. If Obama seriously wanted to burnish his legacy, he would rise up in wrath and confront every area which nourishes violence, from foreign hegemonic adventurism and a worldwide network of military bases to an armaments budget choking off the social welfare to everyday brutality of the police, including unpunished killings, of blacks. If he were serious about anything socially decent, he would come out from hiding, erase the bonds of complicity he established from day 1 with every retrograde sector, from banking to pharmaceuticals, and from the elephant on everyone’s back, an antidemocratic Security State, the climate of massive surveillance being one aspect of the wider militarism tearing out the heart of what democracy still remains. Obama’s best shot is not to gun violence but to the solar plexus of a humanity starved for peace and freedom. His recommendations announced on 1/6 have little more than processing regulations—proper licensing for dealers, background checks for customers, details that however emotional his display of tears over children’s murders, will not hack it in the real world.

JANUARY 7, 2016

**Pierre Boulez, An Appreciation: Music and Revolution**

Sometimes revolutions can be thought of as incremental, harbingers of change down the road, as well as, ordinarily, cataclysmic, resulting in the fundamental alteration of the social order. In this case, Boulez is not Marx, Lenin, or Rosa Luxemburg; he deals instead with nonlethal, barely discriminable attacks on the existing order. Yet for me that is enough because I cherish protean and seminal expression as introducing new sonorities to humankind, capable perhaps of assault on existing patterns of thought, then leading to undermining the social structure itself, based as it is on monolithic, rigid acceptances of order, power, and wealth. I say “perhaps,” because it appears hopeless that aesthetics can be a transformative force doing battle with ruling groups themselves backed by the majesty and armed might of the State in defense of the status quo. So you might think me somewhat deranged when I say that whatever throws a wrench into the tightly-woven mode of consciousness should be honored and encouraged for loosening bonds of passivity and servility, even though not directly culminating in action, but I am buoyed by the hope that aesthetics, for a start, will merge with radical practice in exposing the iron cage in which capitalism has consigned us as the condition of its stability and security.

Boulez does that. He may be indifferent to ideology, but his musical compositions strive for the utmost clarity, a blinding absolutism of honesty, the very consciousness which is SUBVERSIVE to every form of deception and accommodation to reality. A new language, as in his masterwork, *Pli Selon Pli*, negates accepted/conventional meanings, now precision coupled, however, with a nonassimilable mysticism using as his text the poetry of Stephan Mallarme: mind-blowing to all who care to listen, and to take away, as I did on first hearing, rebellious feelings of courage to penetrate beneath the surface of accepted truths, stepping back on one foot, viewing society from a different angle. (Of course I was already a radical, but this was like opening a new door, the world

of self-examination and, I hope, selfless creation: creativity as thumbing one's nose at capitalism and its goal of creating mental paralysis among its subjects.) Thought is subversive, clarity is subversive, searching for epistemological freedom is especially subversive, denying in all cases consumerism, invidious human distinctions (usually over class, property, and wealth), and the morality of war.

Boulez died on January 5, and NYT and the Guardian had informed obituaries the next day, but largely neglected *Pli Selon Pli* and thus failed to probe the underlying power of his work (though doing justice to his career as a conductor, itself beckoning new horizons). Still, what does all of this have to do with radicalism, much less revolution? Any shattering of mental imprisonment in established forms is worth considering. (The deaths of Paul Bley and Elizabeth Swados also were announced the same day, both of whom contributed to the same discombobulation of the reigning consciousness from their own respective art forms—a testimony to the ferment still operating in society.) The historical trick is to recognize, cultivate, and strengthen what is believed deviant; no, if the idea of an avant-garde at the barricades seems foolish, particularly from the vantage point of the unemployed and wider underclass in America and elsewhere, I take this as evidence of society's hell-bent determination to suffocate all dissent, any grasp of alternative systems, the eradication of implosive poetry, as with Mallarme, evidences direct or indirect of independence, standing tall, affirming the right to achieve full human potentiality.

Here poetry matches poetry. (Boulez employs sporadic interventions of the text but presents its musical equivalent, an extraordinary challenge which suggests to me the liberation of the human mind.) *Pli Selon Pli*, or “fold according to fold,” describes Bruges, in the words of *The Gramophone*, as “emerging from dissolving mists,” the result a mind-stretching kaleidoscope of elements, that combination of being precise yet mystical, what I sense to be breathtakingly metaphysical and transcendent driving forward—something not easily contained by the captive mind of the status quo. Again *The Gramophone*: “Its constant shifting on several levels simultaneously is suggestive of a labyrinth wherein colours, motions, shapes are endlessly transformed.” Boulez himself refers to matching music and text: “They [musical quotations] are not literal, but abstracted from their context, displaced; they are like glimpses into the future. The enunciation of the initial poem is, on the contrary, extremely simple, clear, direct and syllabic.” This is not John Reed glimpsing the future, and declaring it is ours, but the future is nevertheless implicit in form, text, and structure—what in my cherished dream would be the anticipation of things to come, world democratization.

Like the composer, the poet from which he draws inspiration, the orchestra (I was privileged to hear it performed in London by the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, Boulez conducting), and for our purposes the listener, one feels the intensity of the whole, as if were it only possible that music could be harnessed to explosive forces of change societal transformation would be close by, in reach. Pierre, R.I.P. It is unfair to burden you with our problems, militarism dwarfing creativity, capitalism distorting human personality, a culture of bread and circuses pulverizing subtleties of thought and observation. You kept the faith, preserving a white-hot intelligence in the face of every effort, as a product of advanced capitalism, to keep our collective heads above water and not be reduced to authoritarian submission.

JANUARY 8, 2016

## **Netanyahu: Rabin's Murderer?**



Political murder is a special case of homicide, often collective, as in crimes against humanity, rather than individual, although assassination comes under this heading. I am not referring to acts of violence associated with robbery, heated disputes, or revenge, but something systemic, regularized, ideally, from the culprit's standpoint, bureaucratized, to hide specific responsibility and involvement. The one who gives the orders is as much implicated as the one who pulls the trigger, possibly more so when command incites to execution, the latter less likely otherwise. Example: Obama has murdered countless individuals through drone assassination, even had he not pored over candidate-lists in the Situation Room. Approval is given, all systems go (!), as his orders are transmitted to operators, like him, thousands of miles from the scene, themselves in comfortable surroundings, playing God to unsuspecting victims. (Today's NYT, 1-7-15, reports these remote-control assassins are receiving full military honors for their work.) War crimes are best perpetrated when hidden from view; ditto, the murder of individual political leaders.

Enter Netanyahu into the discussion. PBS's "Frontline" this week traced his rise and political career, and notwithstanding the usual gaggle of apologists for Israeli policies, e.g., Dennis Ross and Martin Indyck, as well as Netanyahu's own advisers, one sees a compelling narrative of the Rightward drift of Israel's politics, including scenes of outright fanaticism in which a tumultuous crowd is gathered protesting the Oslo Accords. Netanyahu is not haranguing the crowd from the speakers' balcony looking down; rather, he is one more face in the crowd, quite relaxed and evidently pleased at the furor created. What do I make of the scene? Quite simply, Netanyahu did nothing to stop the demonstration. Why should he, he was entirely in agreement with it. Here is a leader who uncorks the bottle, the vitriol pouring out; the leader whose consistent hardline agitation over at least two decades shapes the political-ideological environment for extremism, and, no surprise, much of the Israeli public responds favorably.

This is the context for Rabin's murder. To rephrase, one who pulls the trigger is of secondary importance; even giving the command is not point-specific to culpability when, as here, political

hysteria is whipped up so as to become integral to the Israeli political structure, so that a lone gunman no more than identifies and personifies the collective murderous intent to be directed against internal critics and dissenters as themselves somehow transvalued into terrorists and assassins. This hardly lets Netanyahu off the hook: his methodical coldness in discrediting all opposition, matched by an equal coldness in the arbitrary shelling of population-dense Gaza and summary put-down of rock-throwing youth facing colossal military force, is at one with the fate of Rabin, himself no Liberator of the Palestinian people, yet portrayed as, if this were the Christian equivalent, the arch anti-Christ, an Enemy of the People, thus fair game for execution via mob psychology by an enraged public.

Netanyahu did not pull the trigger; Israel did. But history will not absolve him, his actions both before and since making clear, corresponding to his ability to turn out massive demonstrations, control Knesset policy (as in making representatives of peace groups wear identifying marks), and rejection of elementary civil liberties, that the very concept of “extremism” is a misnomer in Israeli society. There are not extremists when in fact at least two-thirds of Israeli citizens are extreme in their dedication to ethnic cleansing, one Jerusalem, xenophobic dimensions attached to the notion of the Jewish State itself—the society is extremist, not the ultra-Orthodox on whom the label is bestowed. Gradations are arbitrary, designed to exonerate the established leadership and its militaristic foundations. This may seem a long way from MIT and Netanyahu’s sojourn in America, yet his carefully planned rise to power does not miss a beat—and his acceptance by the Israeli electorate, a damning indictment of its war-proclivities and national cult of superiority. Rabin was a soldier, but he showed softness when he sought peace (to be equated with weakness and wholly unacceptable to an Israeli public, peace undermining the prototypic ego-structure on display without let-up.)

Is criticism such as the foregoing anti-Semitic? Judaism unnecessarily recapitulates the horrors of the Holocaust, demonstrating to itself the psychological security that comes from blaring to the world an ethos of strength, power, violence—all reprehensible to a Jewish faith in humanity that I admire and try to live by. Let the goyim engage in assassination, what happened to Rabin a quadruple affront to Jehovah. Netanyahu is the anti-Moses, Israeli Jews the Philistines who defy the Mosaic law at every turn. And American Jews slavishly go along, ignoring their long history in this country, until recently, of devotion to progressive and radical causes, reaching out the arm of friendship, indeed solidarity, to blacks, industrial workers, union membership of all kinds, and to the dispossessed in need of representation. This was always a proud heritage of dissent, bearing, like the Rosenbergs, the brunt of anticommunism, and like Schwerner and Goodman, along with their friend Cheney, the brunt of racial injustice and hatred. Perhaps Israelis should rethink their Jewishness, and discover the beauties of justice and peace and respect for the human soul. Fat chance, however, in the present state of affairs.

JANUARY 11, 2016

**Domestic-Foreign Policy Integration: Gun Control/North Korea**



In theory, all things are, or seemingly appear, interrelated, however dissimilar they may be, as though human activities and events are causally bound together (the historical aphorism about Cleopatra's nose that E.H. Carr mentions), but arcane as that is, we need no special divination to spot the relationship between gun control in America and US policy toward North Korea, for both existential problems stem from a common source: advanced capitalism here particularized through policies brought up to date by Obama's global adventurism and the nation's supporting militarism implementing war, intervention, regime change, and—our separate phenomena now conjoined—the celebration of the cult of violence. America is a boiling cauldron, the twisted logic of dominance (over others), spoliation (of the environment), and possessiveness (erection of the property right as a supreme deity governing class, status, and power in society), together defining the national spirit of hate, greed, fear, above all, conquest, has rendered consistent the inner workings and mentalset of a political-ideological structure geared to contempt for human dignity at home, international peace abroad. We have become a society of warrior-strangers, first, to each other, and then, casting around, to any who dare question our judgment, cross our path, reject our blandishments, or deny our moral purposes and rectitude.

Call it Exceptionalism if you want, but what gives America the right to arrogate to itself the chief role in ordering the global system, using force when necessary (which seems to be more often the case), and with North Korea, going further, to demonize and isolate the Enemy as the basis for its submission to the American will, is exactly the same driving force and set of assumptions at the heart of US gun violence: the braggart, the bully, the despoiler, the outsider, constantly reminded that violence is the key to self-respect (by towering over others), the gun merely the reconciler of status and power, the instrument of aggrandizement in a social order that values besting one another as the true test of character and moral worth. We do to each other what we would like to do to the North Koreans, blast them off the planet in a fit of pique, whether because of an imagined slight or because the Other sees through us, penetrates our defenses, calls our bluff of virtue incarnate.

No, I do not apologize for gun violence; just the reverse, condemning it as the big-shotism (pun not intended) bred-in-the-bone of capitalist social relations. For every crime committed, from murder to bank robbery to individual holdup, etc., through the use of a gun, we see operating the gnawing desire to become a “somebody” (I think of Robert E. Sherwood’s description in his “Roosevelt and Hopkins” of street kids on New York’s Lower East Side who stand in silence in reverence at the news that Dutch Schultz or some other gangster had been slain), a respect that otherwise is denied to all but the affluent and respectable under a capitalist system that denies the universality of human rights and dignity. Even the aforementioned crimes, the gangster phenomenon, would be negligible in a framework predicated on authentic social and economic democracy, where one neither suffers want nor constantly must prove himself/herself. The real source of gun violence is not poverty, but the distorted pictures and narratives implanted from very early in the American mind, where property (in itself coveted under these conditions) is the bridge to superiority, and, projected outward, the selfsame superiority is a battering ram to cram down the throats of others (North Korea here the quintessential scapegoat perhaps for reasons, unlike its neighbor to the South, of noncompliance with American-defined capitalist orthodoxies) the militarized paradigm of market penetration, trade expansion, and unbounded investment opportunities—not coincidentally, the heart of Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership, with the added element of encircling and attempting to isolate (if not also somehow subjugate) China in the process.

Gun violence in America is the normalization of American policy in general, and foreign policy more particularly, in both areas pointing to the glorification of invidious distinction underlined by the moral sanction of superior-inferior social relations, whether of wealth, race, or political influence, indeed, a structural dichotomization prevailing through every aspect of society. In all of this, Veblen was more than a century ahead of his time, from *Theory of the Leisure Class* to *Imperial Germany* an insight into capitalism’s powers of human and national separation, a thirst in both cases for recognition, the aforementioned big-shotism believed thwarted from without. The place of militarism as contributing mightily to hierarchy in all its manifestations—individual wealth, national hegemony in international politics—provides a unifying experience for relating domestic gun violence to the dominance over/containment of North Korea. Pyongyang is like Detroit or Chicago’s South Side, if not to be squashed down or eradicated, at least to know its place in the hierarchical framework of truth and virtue, i.e., at the bottom. America busily steps on whatever it disapproves of, an ideological-mental climate which handily separates gangsters who kill at the point of a gun, from law-and-order Authority which also kills at the point of a gun (current police brutality being entirely legitimate, few questions asked, and accounting for its full share of gun violence).

One wonders, would respectful treatment of individuals’ rights, and the toning down of profit-seeking and invidiousness, have yielded different outcomes with respect to both crime and the wild proliferation of weaponry in America? Would skull-bashing of striking workers by federal troops, state militias, local police, and private detective agencies, had they never occurred, in a hospitable context for labor rights, resulted in different outcomes with respect to popularizing and legitimating the use of force as a class weapon in defining labor’s place in America? The nation got off on the wrong foot very early, making the historical emphasis on gun rights both understandable and perfectly acceptable; for every criminal taking lives and money at gunpoint, there are many more packing weapons—in some states, unconcealed – to test their self-identity as Bunyanesque salt-of-

the-earth moral enforcers of the American way. From putting down slave revolts before the Civil War, to intimidating whomever appeared different or thought differently in our day, the gun was a useful appendage, code for patriotism and antiradicalism, in the enforcement of that way of life: property, preclusive of whom to exclude from the folk community of capitalism, and casting the view outward, demanding, yes, demanding (as in the case of North Korea) compulsory respect for, and absolute acceptance of, that very way of life.

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Let's turn first to Obama's op-ed piece in NYT, January 8, entitled, "Barack Obama: Guns Are Our Shared Responsibility," a holier-than-thou plea for less than effective gun control which is wholly contradicted by his own and his administration's record of massive killings in foreign lands while doing little to stem the violence at home. Lest my point on this be not emphasized enough, the two are closely related, in that legitimated killings abroad sanction and habituate the American public to the depersonalization of death at home—legitimation as the product of established authority, giving violence a head-start to all claimants of moral rightness, including a financial system that practices violence by driving some into poverty while rewarding others with staggering wealth, as well as the now common-variety of violence, shooting down young blacks in the spirit of impunity. (The badge is handed out by God.) Carpet bombing, torture, intervention per se, all have their effect on the domestic psyche, breeding lawlessness under the umbrella of law—or for corporations, also the same. Our home generals, deserving respect, are the pharmaceutical CEOs, hedge fund operators, media personalities, all dishing out class weapons (pens and microphones replacing guns) to maintain hierarchy, militarism, obliteration of personal autonomy, in place. Anything less is presumably an invitation to terrorism (Israel already labeling dissidents and opponents of the reigning coalition as terrorists, America, as in the innuendoes trotted out in the present campaign, not far behind).

Obama's umbrella, "common-sense gun reform," is farcical; he throws in the towel even before he starts. After correctly declaring, "The epidemic of gun violence in our country is a crisis. Gun deaths and injuries constitute one of the greatest threats to public health and to the safety of the American people," he now retreats: "A national crisis like this demands a national response. Reducing gun violence will be hard. It won't happen during my presidency." Obama spreads out the national response; rather than bearing down—as did FDR when he addressed poverty and unemployment specifically through using the power of the federal government—he calls on a feel-good participation accomplishing nothing (even the private sector a valued ally): "Still, there are steps we can take now to save lives. And all of us—at every level of government, in the private sector and as citizens—have to do our part." Thus: "We all have a responsibility."

But we don't have a responsibility to cease war, intervention, regime change, or paramilitary operations and drone assassination, among "citizens" a nonstarter when it comes to public policy and government boundaries on achieving positive social change. Responsibility is a limited goal designed not to interfere with the foregoing policy-characteristics, themselves, as I've argued, contributory factors to the acceptance and approval of violence itself. A nation up to its neck in displaying force (as through NATO at the Russian border or in carrier battle-groups in the South China Sea) cannot but reinforce gun rights and a gun culture at home, the current swagger in Oregon not unlike the swagger in US military bases worldwide. A nation at peace, having equitable wealth distribution, and assigning responsibility to government for achieving the health and well-



being of its citizens, is not likely to have the problem of gun violence. Yet Obama prattles on, oblivious—given how far a gun culture, and its psychological attributes of disdain for human life, has penetrated defensive layers of self-justification to the heart of the American Mind—that he is mouthing platitudes (or worse, knowing he is) which ensure that neither regulation at home nor inspiration from America’s conduct abroad will have changed, a tawdry record of complicity and deception favoring the mentality of combativeness good for the functioning of capitalism.

In the face of US global imperialism, his gun-reforms at home are mealy-mouthed at best: “They [recommendations on January 5] include making sure that anybody engaged in the business of selling firearms conducts background checks, expanding access to mental health treatment and improving gun safety technology.” National crisis; by his own admission, modest expected gains: “These actions won’t prevent every act of violence, or save every human life—but if even one life is spared, they will be well worth the effort.” Obama means business, as in this widely quoted passage: “I will not campaign for, vote for or support any candidate, even in my own party, who does not support common-sense gun reform.” I.e., personal involvement sets an example; structural-legal obstruction of gun manufacture and distribution is postponed indefinitely. He appeals to “the vast majority of responsible gun owners” to do the right thing, specifics not mentioned. Ditto, the “gun industry,” which should be encouraged to meet, like the producers of “consumer goods,” the “high standards to keep our families and communities safe.” Guns become a special case of consumer goods, not lethal instruments of human harm and societal breakdown: “Cars have to meet safety and emissions requirements. Food has to be clean and safe. We will not end the cycle of gun violence until we demand that the gun industry take simple actions to make the product safer as well.” Don’t eliminate guns, give them safety catches; he rounds out the passage: “If a child can’t open a bottle of aspirin, we should also make sure she can’t pull the trigger of a gun.”

This marks the trivialization in safeguarding against gun violence. Still, the industry and its lobby remain uncooperative, and their obstruction is backed by Congress—Obama rightly complaining, “They’ve guaranteed that manufacturers enjoy virtual immunity from lawsuits, which means that they can sell lethal products and rarely face consequences,” but then dips into his box of clichés by creating a false analogy between guns and car seats. “As parents,” he writes, “we wouldn’t put up with this if we were talking about family car seats. Why should we tolerate it for products—guns—that kill so many children each year?” One devoutly wishes for better car seats, but until government focuses directly on guns, their deadly character per se, action is diverted from requisite steps bringing them under direct supervision, control, drastic reduction in the polity. Obama wants manufacturers “to make guns smarter and safer,” as in the development of “microstamping for ammunition,” which neither touches on their supply, lethality, or availability. Stand firm, Americans: “demand leaders brave enough to stand up to the gun lobby’s lies,” and get “governors, mayors and our representatives in Congress [to] do their part.” Gun-control issues merge with the body of great social issues of Liberal America, at the pace expected of liberalism—slow, modulated, expressly rendered nonradical: “Change will be hard. It won’t happen overnight. But securing a woman’s right to vote didn’t happen overnight. The liberation of African-Americans didn’t happen overnight. Advancing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans has taken decades’ worth of work.” He pulls out all the stops: “Those moments represent American democracy, and the American people, at our best.” Meanwhile, wars continue, munitions factories go full tilt, arms exports to dictators the same, nothing truly ventured nothing gained—quite typical of Obama.

My New York Times Comment to the Obama op-ed article, same date, (submitted, yet despite my being a regular contributor, the green check mark, it is then rejected, i.e., placed under the censor's axe by NYT, no doubt because controversial) follows:

"I will not campaign for...." Let me hear, "I will not mercilessly bomb innocent civilians through drone assassination." Let me hear, a halt to war, intervention, regime change. Let me hear, the social safety net is tattered, I will drastically reduce the military budget and take care of human needs. In other words, Obama stands side-by-side with the murderers of our time. (If this is too strong for NYT, let them censor it.) There is a direct correlation between gun violence in America and America's gun violence with respect to the rest of the world. Barrington Moore would have called this, "legitimated violence," that which is done from above by Authority on behalf of law and order (or fill in the blank, so long as it supports upper-groups' business and military agendas).

Others have noted Obama's crocodile tears when tragedy strikes. He doesn't display them when he backs rightist regimes who kill indiscriminately, only when, as now, it is advantageous to do so. And on foreign policy he has dragged a not-very-struggling Democratic party along with him, so that Hillary and Bernie are not very different on US hegemonic claims and not very different from their Republican rivals.

America will remain violent because it thinks violently, cultivates violence as a sign of national strength, luxuriates in violence as testimony to its unblemished moral character. Away with such phoniness. Obama can sleep at night because he is well-habituated to the killings he has ordered.

Finally, we find the worship of violence, as essential to advanced-capitalist development for its continued growth both at home and abroad, preventing domestic stagnation and unemployment while also energizing and providing the military clout for global market penetration and investment, directly relevant to interventionist policies addressed to the neutralization of North Korea because, as noted above, of its noncompliance with US-defined capitalist orthodoxies. North Korea has committed the cardinal sin, which is interference with (and perhaps seeing through the follies of) American Exceptionalism, an expansionist quest which brooks no opposition. Violence becomes the midwife of US global dominance, creating the integration of domestic and foreign policy, a congruence of purpose in which beating down North Korea, as one example of many over the years, keeps the xenophobic-ethnocentric mentalset at home sharply tuned, ready to spring. The foremost imperialist power in the world cannot expect less of itself if it is going to manifest the strength to stay on top, let alone survive, in the face of ascending rivals, notably China, which, not by chance, is North Korea's protector. In US policymaking circles, to contain and weaken North Korea is to strike at China.

We note then the ethics (or lack thereof) of superiority, consistent with the treatment of every other point of intervention and regime change: a rigid conception of national security that corresponds to an equally rigid psychological framework of holding the line at all costs—the domino theory alive and well in the year of our Lord 2016. Here I turn briefly to David Sanger and Choe Sang-Hun's Times article, "U.S. Prods China on North Korea, Saying Soft Approach Has Failed," January 8, never mind since 1950 the approach has not been soft, Pyongyang a particularly hated target in an evolving all-purpose Asia policy having China, India, and Afghanistan in mind.

The hermit kingdom couldn't break out of its isolation even if it wanted to. To put a fine point on matters, US contempt for and opposition to North Korea was not only psychological or ideological, but also had to do with market expansion and the spread of capitalism, not there, of course, although South Korea and Japan were showcases of the American Way, but widening the region of US enterprise as a whole, knocking down all barriers, and thus reviving the dream and actuality of the Open Door policy of the latter 19th century.

Angered by the North's nuclear test earlier in the week, America's first response was to blame China. The reporters write: "In a striking public rebuke of China, Secretary of State John Kerry warned Beijing on Thursday [January 7] that its effort to rein in North Korea had been a failure and that something had to change in its handling of the isolated country it has supported for the past six decades." Sanger-Choe parrot State Department belligerence, quoting Kerry's demanding/accusatory statement to Wang Yi of the Chinese foreign ministry without comment as to America's claims to define and supervise affairs in the region: "China had a particular approach that it wanted to make, and we agreed and respected to give them space to be able to implement that. Today in my conversation with the Chinese I made it clear: That has not worked, and we cannot continue business as usual." Always "we," we agreed, we gave them space, we no longer can tolerate the situation—I'm sorry but who the hell are WE either to control North Korea or tell China what to do?!

There follows the usual, squeeze the North still further, until they cry uncle (Sam). Thus: "Two administration officials said the United States was now drafting a proposed resolution for United Nations Security Council approval that would impose sanctions on North Korean trade and finance, including a partial ban on permitting North Korean ships to enter ports around the world, an effort to cut off more of the country's trade." Not enough? Go further: "A second set of sanctions under consideration is a cutoff of North Korean banking relationships, similar to the restrictions placed on Iran in the successful effort to drive it to the negotiation table on its nuclear program." (This goes beyond Bush II's sanctions regime on banking, which his administration "eventually ... relented [on] and lifted ... in part because of pressure from the government then in place in South Korea." Hence, Obama the more doctrinaire ideologue of the two, at least in this case.) Still not enough, Sanger-Choe continue the account: "The most effective step against North Korea, most experts believe, would be the one that the Chinese most oppose: a restriction or cutoff of oil exports to the North. The country is highly dependent on oil that runs through a small number of pipelines from China." Again, America seeks to exercise a supervising/supervening role in the internal life of another country, and between the lines engage in pushback against China.

The sanctions regime appears less harmful or destructive than military intervention, and passes for a more enlightened, albeit sophisticated, response, but this is mistaken, not only because sanctions cause human privation (North Korea is today's Gaza, Gaza, about the same time, yesterday's North Korea), but also because for the implementation of sanctions the military is not far behind. Sanger-Choe write: "The United States Pacific Command met on Thursday to take up other, if largely symbolic [are they kidding?] steps. One is an overflight of the border between North and South Korea with a nuclear-capable bomber, the B-52 or the B-2." In addition, throw in a missile shield, hardly defensive in character. They write further: "South Korean and American officials said there was also renewed discussion of deploying an advanced missile defense system [really, like the NATO-based "defense" system facing Russia], called the Thaad for Terminal High-

Altitude Area Defense, in South Korea.” But here, reality sets in; the geopolitical world is changing. South Korea can no longer be relied on to be the abject ally, dependable partner, of America. Economic tides, despite Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership, are shifting: “The United States has been pressing for such a deployment for some time, but the South has resisted, largely because of opposition from China, which is the South’s leading trade partner.”

Not only is China making inroads in Latin America, and besting America in Africa, but now is doing the same in its own backyard—driving Obama, his administration, etc., into even greater defiance with respect to North Korea, the brave soldier with his finger in the dike to plug the hole through which US influence is gradually seeping out. North Korea, time to make a decisive stand and in doing so whet Americans’ appetite, already in an advanced state of conditioning, for violence, its helpmate, and for militarism, its contributory matrix, capitalism, a boost up necessary for business as usual.

My New York Times Comment to the Sanger-Choe article (this one published), same date, follows:

Economic strangulation, overflights by nuclear-capable B-52s and B-2s, that will show those Commies who’s boss in (and over) the world system. “...we cannot continue business as usual.” We... this, we... that: everything we, as though holding a God-given mandate to shape and determine Asian and indeed global history, structures, cultures. Kerry comes off poorly here, perhaps as usual, because he is merely the implementer of US hegemonic foreign policy.

Political chutzpah with respect to China and South Korea, enlisting their support for regime change which would destabilize the region as the least of the problems raised, as well as being none of our business (as usual). American dictation of global affairs is coming to an end, either that or the biggest conflagration yet—which the US foreign-policy establishment appears unconsciously to welcome. Thanatosean America on the march, its death wish forcibly extended to all others because, largely, an empty civilization of war, regime change, and unabashed consumerism leaves a moral void in the pit of America’s stomach.

China will not consent to go along with the more outrageous “solutions” to North Korea’s international conduct, in part because it recognizes that the West is responsible for driving North Korea into isolation. The we shall do this, do that ethos is catching up with America, Obama’s Trans-Pacific Partnership to encircle and perhaps eventually dismember (doesn’t the US wish!) China not helping matters.

JANUARY 13, 2016

### **Privatization: National Descent into Hell**

One does not have to be a Marxist to say that property in our times, i.e., in a system of modern capitalism, is a curse on human intelligence and the endeavor to lead a meaningful life when it has been set against the concept, practice, and reality of the PUBLIC realm as such, whether the moral obligation of government to provide for the general welfare or, as immediately before us now, the nation’s public lands, reserved as the heritage for all the people symbolizing freedom and common

purpose, no longer capitalism trumping the principle of democracy, exploitation trumping the natural wealth of present and future generations, raw greed trumping the sense and sensibility of a living culture fulfilled through social cooperation and altruism. That the US has already fallen well below the standard of democracy, conservation, altruism helps explain the systemic pickle America is in, when among its most precious possessions, the LAND itself, is subject to the venomous thirst of a depredatory political culture consonant with the existence of massive wealth differentials and the ideological enshrinement of wealth as self-justifying, protected by while remaining above the law. In fact, what LAW, when society's unifying act is ownership conferring absolute rights of usage and, as wealth increases, shaping institutions and laws alike, with ruling groups forming the chief beneficiaries of this privatized structure which is heavily dependent on human separation and indifference to the needs of community. In short, America 2016, a continuity of societal process in its present form since at least the latter 19th century, exemplified by the plebeian fascism of armed insurrectionary ranchers in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge as mere shock troops for the more basic corporate fascist takeover of America requiring symbols to justify and legitimate what, under the heading of antigovernment protest, is in reality the seizure of national wealth, the little guys cut in for the crumbs, by the militarized oligarchy of financial-industrial capitalism.

Item: today (1-12) we read in the NYT that yesterday, in Princeton, Oregon, armed occupiers of the refuge, appropriately calling themselves Citizens for Constitutional Freedom (using national symbols to advantage while transvaluing their meaning into the opposite—even the Orwellian world turned upside down), “have escalated their defiance of the federal government ... using bare hands and a Wildcat excavator stolen from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to rip apart a barbed wire fence erected by the government at a far end of the vast refuge.” The rape of the environment is an ongoing fact of life in America, USF&WS hardly an adequate protector (same old story of US regulatory agencies in the hands of the interests which are to be regulated, dating back to at least the ICC and railroads of an earlier time), except that here issues are, in microcosm, so dramatically drawn even the agency is driven to protest. This, with Burns triggering the takeover of federal lands, while only a blip on the historical-ideological radar screen, is indicative of the fascistization now underway of the American polity, a wider context, even with respect to public lands, necessary for such insurrection to be possible. Yet daily in all ways the private encroachment of the public goes on, as in harnessing imperialism to such hegemonic purposes as global market and financial domination, the American military the ragtag propertied forces of Ammon Bundy writ large, literally, property on the march, privatization at home matching control of the internal economies of other nations abroad, a fetishism of capitalistic absolutism, with B-52s, regular and paramilitary forces, the CIA, and, briefcases in hand, the IMF and World Bank, the enlarged functional equivalent of the Wildcat excavator.

Complicating the process of government as the representation of the people's interests is that with rare exceptions, chiefly, in the New Deal, where public service was somehow extricated, as in CCC and WPA, from the swamp of Corporate Servitude, the history of regulation in America has been a betrayal of the people and the philosophy of democracy. So, even before this, with the public lands; but now, blatantly emblazoned, along with such ideological signs as in carrying weapons openly, as advertisement of things to come—dismantlement of the social safety net, for starters, an end to protective legislation in the workplace, abolition of progressive taxation, grab-as-grab can extraction of natural resources, further growth of the military budget, steps in the direction, all in all, toward full-blown totalitarianism, Ammon's ranchers prototypical shock troops, and the legions

of recruits drawn from small business, disillusioned labor, and the white collar sector of insurance agents and other examples of Babbitts standing shoulder to shoulder with them nationwide, as so much window dressing for the large-scale skullduggery normalizing the pattern of wealth and power systemically rooted in a private-rights economy and society. Grazing rights are on a continuum with Individualism run amuck, an ideological springboard to unrestrained capitalist development in increasingly fewer hands.

But while our attention is on Burns and east-central Oregon, we see a parallel process at work far more damaging to the public realm, precisely because appropriating the mantle of legality, yes, privatization via legislative action rather than armed insurrection, the latter an energizing tool which also lends respectability to the former. (A Far-Rightist projection makes the Right itself look Centrist, the usefulness of shock troops to ongoing privatization.) I am referring to Jack Healy and Kirk Johnson's NYT article, "The Larger, but Quieter Than Bundy, Push to Take Over Federal Land," January 11, which describes, in this area, what is going on promiscuously everywhere in the nation's law-making, including this week, what appears to be the Supreme Court's serious crippling of public-sector unions: a contagion of feeling and doctrine aimed at bringing America to its knees with respect to human rights, equality, and the moral-political obligation of government and society to their full realization and preservation. Healy-Johnson begin: "Ken Ivory, a Republican state representative from Utah, has been roaming the West with an alluring pitch to cattle ranchers, farmers and conservatives upset with how Washington controls the wide-open public spaces out here: This land is your land, he says, and not the federal government's." Aside from negating the whole thrust of Pete Seeger's magnificent anthem in celebration of the commonweal, a polity of justice, now caricatured so as to be the basis for its destruction, we see in Ivory an advanced agent of plutocracy providing the nuts-and-bolts actions, one of many such persons, for that destruction: "Mr. Ivory, a business lawyer from suburban Salt Lake City, does not fit the profile of a sun-scorched sagebrush rebel. But he is part of a growing Republican-led movement pushing the federal government to hand over to the states millions of acres of Western public lands—as well as their rich stores of coal, timber and grazing grass."

Selfless modern-day Minute Men, not hardly unless you give the Koch Brothers fife and drum: "It's like having your hands on the lever of a modern-day Louisiana Purchase," said Mr. Ivory, who founded the American Lands Council [always the names, in Goebbels'-style propaganda, seem so innocent and harmless] and until recently was its president. The Utah-based group is funded mostly by donations from county governments [presumably still closer to appeals for privatization], but has received support from Americans for Prosperity [another beauty!], the group back by the billionaire Koch brothers.'" They continue: The idea of "radically reshap[ing] the West" fits well with Bundy's occupation effort, and "has grown amid a dust storm of rural anger" at Obama's supposed [my interpretation, not theirs] "efforts to tighten regulations on fracking, air quality, small streams and other environmental issues" accounting for the anger. Here Rightist Centrism merely drives the Far Right to further extremes, a pretext using Obama to pull out all stops. "In the past few years," the reporters note, "lawmakers across the West have offered up dozens of bills and resolutions seeking to take over the federal lands.... Some of the legislation has been aimed at Congress, to urge it to radically revise the laws that have shaped 550,000 square miles of national forests and terrain ... stretching from the Great Plains to the Pacific." The Bureau of Land Management, reading some of the statements in Congress, would seem to be a branch of the Soviet

Politburo—and even Ted Cruz had jumped in early (July 2014) with a proposal “preventing the federal government from owning more than half of any state’s land.”

As the reporters point out, details are meager on how to execute the provisions of privatization, the important point being first to knock out the federal government, the mission statement of the American Lands Council strategy “for securing local control of public land in the West” thus involving “four tenets: education, negotiation, legislation and litigation.” When fascism comes to America (if it has not already) it may involve, not armed insurrection, but the lawyerly stealth of vested interests via the utter transmogrification of constitution, law, ethics, the whole nine yards of inverting principles of democracy and social justice. Not to worry: Phil Lyman, a San Juan County, Utah commissioner “received a 10-day jail sentence after he led a protest ride on all-terrain vehicles through a federal area that had been closed to motorized use,” showing the government is on the people’s side, handing out stiff sentences for breaking the law. Bosh. The law is contemptuously broken with occasional slaps on the wrist, with larger numbers of Americans echoing Lyman’s own statement: “It seems to be getting worse, and the federal agencies, they are expanding. Their restraints are being overstepped. It’s not the way this country was set up. It’s not the founders’ design.” No siree, America’s greatness more and more has come to mean, property over all else, government be damned, nature just one more hostage to the appetitive spirit.

JANUARY 15, 2016

### **The Politics of Cultural Despair: America’s Self-Immolation**

America offers itself in sacrifice, a sacrificial victim to its hunger for, not just capitalism, although its centuries of ideological brainwashing has rendered capitalism per se infused with societal purpose, but capitalist hegemony, the exercise of preponderant influence and power, the top rung of the ladder, in unilaterally shaping the global structure to its military-financial-commercial advantage. Ain’t gonna happen; can’t happen; maybe in the aftermath of World War II, when the rest of the world was exhausted, prostrated, but not now, in an infinitely more complex international system organized around discrete major power blocs capable of recognizing their respective self-interests and acting accordingly. China is not afraid of the US, nor is Russia, nor, increasingly, is the EU, and that just for starters. This is a rude awakening for America, and given its national beliefs, the moral certitude of its own exceptionalism, its faith in militaristic responses to perceived trouble, its feigned reliance on God to see it through the foibles of wealth concentration and foreign adventurism, such a fate of political-structural decline will not be taken lightly, that is, not without a fight before it sinks down into the abyss of everyday equality with other nations—a horrible nightmare to the arrogant, the spoiled, the conquering heroes of American political and economic leadership.

A straw in the wind: the reengineering of nuclear weaponry to emphasize tactical weapons and thus make nuclear war itself thinkable. Another straw in the wind: the long lines to buy tickets for the Powerball drawings, a futile act of desperation in search of wealth, the get-rich schemes gnawing into the national mindset. Actually, they have in common what I term Thanatosean America, in Freud, an instinctual desire for death, but without its counterweight, an affirmation of the forces of life. How can there be life, when America has constructed an enormous death machine draining all before it and leaving an empty husk in the civil space with unemployment, a crumbling

infrastructure, xenophobic mouthings, extensive poverty (coupled with all-time wealth concentration, billionaires roaming the political landscape) to fill in the vacuum. Life? Obama's pet project is drone assassination. And that is window dressing for the underlying systemic dynamics which have reduced the individual to an obedient cipher, the logical end of transforming him/her into a commodity, capitalism's depersonalization of the human being.

We have just witnessed the State of the Union address, Obama's plea for civility in politics, yet he paints too dour a picture in one critical respect: civility abounds in American politics when it comes to the important things. Civility, as bipartisan consensus, over war, intervention, regime change (even Bernie on the Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse); civility, over the warrant for commercial-financial expansion, disguised as America's destiny (exceptionalism); civility, over one-sided trade partnerships; civility, over environmental degradation; civility, over humongous military budgets (here Bernie may be potentially breaking away); thus, civility where it counts, the widespread acceptance in politics, economics, and culture of a United States clinging to life-support, so that its puristic capitalism can remain unblemished, a conception of capitalism as fitting for the late 19th century (with its Darwinian rationales for wealth and race inequality, and for the building of gigantic holdings in industry and finance) as for the present day, accelerating these trends to a point where America stands alone and supreme as the custodian of unearned wealth and repository of fear, as though associated through an implicit assumption that the gig is up: no further forcible remaking of the world in its image.

Where civility does not hold lies in the race to see who can better serve wealth, strengthen the military, and manipulate—if such is needed—the individual to blind submission to these ends. Here the Democrats are giving the Republicans a race for their money, now the loyal opposition in proving their 100% Americanism, a Trump-Clinton contest requiring an electron microscope to spot the differences. The fascistic garbage being spouted on the Republican side, animating the spirit of the militia movements and gun-toting public, is ineffectually opposed by the other side, and on foreign policy Sanders has yet to distinguish himself from Clinton or Republicans. Politics is a unique barometer of the national mind and spirit; for America, the bravado of the rhetoric suggests a stridency of running scared to hide an awareness of declining fortunes, a political economy bereft of performance serving the general welfare, a military establishment gone cockamamie (under civilian-leadership instigation) in its quest for power and absolutist national security, a docile citizenry unmindful of the totalitarian implications of massive NSA surveillance ... but hold on, you may have a winning Powerball ticket, and so everything is okay. Dream on, as alienation crumbles a democratic social order.

JANUARY 19, 2016

### **In Memoriam, Dr. King: A Belated Tribute**

I did not attend my university's ceremonies commemorating the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. How could I? Michigan State was up to its neck in violating the record and spirit of everything Dr. King did and stood for, and yet today, January 17, it seeks, as does Barack Obama and the preponderance of national black leaders, to hide behind his image, falsifying it to satisfy current policies of war, reaction, corporate-financial usurpation of democratic principles, blaspheming his memory for the proverbial gold coin derived from feathering the nest of of the economic elite and



its military cohort. I believe I have earned the right to criticize, not because I, and countless others, including Sen. Sanders, attended the March on Washington, but because I saw at first hand, looking directly into his eyes from six inches away, the fear of assassination, yet determination to plow on, that Dr. King carried as a burden in the last few years of his life.

In contrast, fast-forward several years, Clifton Wharton, MSU's first black president, when I first joined the faculty, had recently completed a stint serving the Rockefeller Brothers' interests in upper South America (a not-so-early indication of the counterrevolutionary role played by CIA-assisted NGOs and private foundations in American foreign policy), carrying forward the earlier work of John Hannah, who grossly assisted in the dirtiest of dirty policies, including torture, in Vietnam, and, in the protests against the war, here and on college campuses throughout the country in Spring of 1970, ringed the student union building, where faculty and students were planning the next stage of the Strike (to go into the inner city schools of Detroit and help out in any way possible), with black paddy wagons drawn from the local police forces and at midnight conducted mass arrests, including that of a pregnant woman, on the ground of violating the building's closing hours, for an overnight stay in the Lansing jail. So much for freedom of expression, so much for committing the heinous crimes of taking our classes into the churches of the community so as not to miss assignments and volunteering for conducting tutorials in Detroit's schools. Wharton persisted with a full-dress hearing days later, not unlike the general atmosphere of the school, where "patriotic" faculty denounced their colleagues (something I had not forgotten in 29 years as full professor, but par for the course wherever universities were complicit in US war planning, acts of prostitution in servicing corporate research needs, etc., and staffed by professors cum careerists and ideologues, often the same). From there he went on to head TIAA-CREF and have a major entertainment center on campus named after him.

Yet it is those in administrative posts today, black and white, and the faculty flunkies courting favor, who dare celebrate Dr. King today, individuals who, if they were of Dr. King's generation, were contemptuous of his Poor People's Campaign, and even more, his strong antiwar position. That is the problem: those who never earned their stripes in either the civil-rights or antiwar struggles, and their present-day inheritors of the heart-wrenching sacrifices he made to get them to where they are, Obama, above all, have simply cashed in, with utter cynicism, and betrayed their fellow blacks (where do we find even the semblance of a vital social safety net, the redistribution of wealth and power, the pursuit of genuine peace, even control over police brutality?) and social-justice aims of government. And not to appear prejudiced, blacks are only mirroring the nation's mindset, still white defined, in which the standards raised by Dr. King are repudiating them in the act of honoring them, a systemic Janus-faced hypocrisy at the heart of the country's psyche.

Eyeball-to-eyeball contact: Return to Spring 1965, the Selma March went off as planned. How could it not, with the star power in the first two rows, the international media coverage, the protection provided—none of the grittiness and danger that soon followed, when people went home and media attention turned elsewhere? Intuitively I stayed away (unlike the March on Washington two years before, which felt somehow different, a mass demonstration seeming to break new ground—although it, too, had its precedents on a smaller scale), yet when we heard that Rev. James Reeb, a Boston Unitarian minister, had been murdered on the streets of Selma (Reeb once officiated at the marriage of one of my students), I, then at Yale, organized an interracial group from Yale Divinity School, borrowed a car, and rushed down to provide reinforcements—and there the

moving significance of Selma began for me. Shortly after arrival we were crowded in Brown's Church, sitting in the rounded balcony, where Dr. King delivered a magnificent eulogy for Rev. Reeb. We were a true congregation, not an audience, and as we sang "We Shall Overcome," hands on each others' shoulders, swaying in alternate directions, the effect was indescribable. That night we held an all-night vigil from the church, facing a road in which Alabama state-trooper vehicles two abreast stretched practically as far as the eye could see, a symbolic confrontation, completely safe, typical of such observances, except for the display of force.

Later in the week, things changed. Dr. King and staff entered the Montgomery courthouse, a small group of followers gathered outside, to voice demands for better conditions and voting rights, as meanwhile a drenching rain had set in. We were miles away, in Selma. Word came of those outside being subject to severe beatings by the police; James Farmer, leader of CORE and a truly impressive figure, sent word out to me and others, get to Montgomery and reinforce the protest. Again, an interracial car, speeding there (as I describe in an earlier CP article, winding up in a cavalcade of state troopers also rushing to the scene, too busy for us—a steady 80 mph or more), and arriving, a scene of desolation: cracked skulls, bodies strewn everywhere in the little park, rain falling in sheets. After awhile, soaked to the skin, I made my way back to the car via a narrow alley, returning to the scene with only a gabardine coat on. It was there I saw Dr. King accompanied by Andrew Young, squeezing through the narrow space; they spotted me in the distance, and I realized, they may have thought I was an assassin coming toward them. We stopped, I did everything possible to reassure them by facial expression, mumbled words, posture, and as we passed so close as barely to get by, time had frozen in what seemed an eternity, as I conveyed my respect and, yes, love, and then we went our ways. The carnage was awful, part of the true story of Selma after the spotlights were turned off. Another part of the story, which we did not know at the moment, on our safe return to Selma that night, was that a car driven by Viola Liuzzo of Detroit, also with an interracial group, was shot at on that lonely highway, with Mrs. Liuzzo killed, murdered.

Our would-be King-legacy-inheritors, who have shown they don't give a snap for the poor, of both races, and, as part of their self-promotion have enlisted in the cause of imperialism, to the killing and maiming largely of persons of color, these leaders, white and black alike, righteous to their tippy toes, are as I write solemnly extolling Dr. King's virtues suitably sanitized to expunge from the record his answering the call of the Memphis sanitation workers and the underclass as a whole in America, his stance, though obviously unpopular at the time, of opposition to the war in Vietnam, as, if he were alive today, his opposition to all of America's wars, interventions, regime changes, its confrontation with China and Russia, its manipulation of international trade arrangements both to further US market penetration and serve as pretext for military alliance systems, joint maneuvers, the march to hegemonic unilateral dominance in the world, a sordid record of achievement for which his rejection cost him his life. By all means, celebrate the man wholly disjointed from the ruling groups and power structure responsible for the problems and grievances he sought to rectify, a sainthood detached from the reality of his struggles, having the effect of cheapening both. The paradox of dishonoring the honored sums up the current practice, one exemplified in the Democratic debate tonight in which Clinton and Sanders are trying to outdo each other in courting the black vote.

As preparation for that event, Clinton has issued a proposal for improving the condition and status of blacks (the linkage supplied in today's Guardian) entitled, "Growing Together: Hillary

Clinton's Vision for a New Economic Future for African-American Communities," perhaps good as far as it goes, but problematic to a fault because far too generalized to be useful, even as a "vision," and more important, so structurally situated completely within existing capitalism as to limit the possibility of securing the modest goals to be attained. The document notes that "more than half a century after Dr. King voiced his dream for a more equal America and civil rights activists marched and died for the right to vote, race still plays a role in determining who gets ahead in America—and who gets left behind." Splendid, though nowhere is it mentioned that inequality goes beyond questions of voting rights and upward mobility, to the systemic attributes of advanced capitalism in America, which includes increasing wealth-concentration and industrial-financial consolidation, fueled not only by long-term trends of governmental corporate policies, but also a foreign-policy course of aggressively securing raw materials, markets, and investments—none of the foregoing alluded to, or remotely touched on, in her remediation of inequality in general, racial inequality in particular. In fact, she has supported, as senator and Secretary of State exactly those developments that make a mockery of her sudden interest in, and support of, improving the existing racial disparities in rights, wealth, and power.

Clinton presents her program in a vacuum: universalize educational opportunities, make college affordable, create good-paying jobs, preserve and strengthen Social Security, reform the criminal justice system, prevent gun violence, support small business—each and all (along with several more, like ending racial profiling and promoting better transportation to work) highly commendable, but even if achieved, neither improving the goal of racial democratization nor reducing the existence, privileges, and advantages of a demonstrable ruling group or class in command of consequential decision-making affecting war and peace abroad, civil liberties at home, and the myriad details in between, from environmental protection to labor organization. But why should we expect differently? Clinton is a good Democrat, nothing more or less, and thus pledged to a distorted, exaggerated view of national security, an allegiance to monopoly capital and specialized sectors like energy, pharmaceuticals, above all, defense. At best, blacks will be more comfortable in a Clintonian world, yet one that savages the rest of the world and those, domestically, who do not play the game, their comfort bringing them down to the same level of complicity with and enjoyment of the benefits derived from militarism and imperialism.

Dr. King saw through this ideological sham. Black self-improvement through the canons (and cannons) of a merciless violence-prone capitalism was, he believed, not worth the candle, a denigration of the potential racial ennoblement as preparation for a unified humankind. He did not have to be anti-capitalist per se; simply to be an advocate for non-violence was itself the sufficient answer to modern capitalism, which depends for its sustainment and performance on war and the preparation for war. By virtually all agreement, Clinton is a hawk, which invalidates her position on the whole gamut of her provisions for racial betterment: an opportunist who is tweaking the system for fairer mortgage rates which it should provide anyway, as meanwhile the ongoing processes of wealth creation continue unabated. And Sanders is not much better, whether on race or foreign policy. At least she took the trouble to issue a position paper, poor as it is, as he, glad-handing his way through the states, feigns democratic socialism, smiles, and leaves the structure of American imperialism intact, and the industries, banks, and firms standing behind it. If Dr. King would have had little use for Clinton, what use would Eugene Debs have had for Sanders?

We live in a world of imposters, the gradual melding into one of a position defined as American, with little to distinguish candidates of both parties, save on degrees of protestation as to their patriotism (Sanders keeps invoking veterans, not to say his historically compromised position on gun control, which he is now expected to modify) and obeisance to the property right. So be it, we get what we deserve. And America does not deserve to celebrate Dr. King's birthday; it has, instead, defamed him in ways large and small, ratcheting up violence while eroding basic guarantees of the human person, in both cases to the sacrifice of elemental principles of social justice and individual as well as structural potentiality. We turn, then, briefly to the Democratic debate. [I have now watched the debate on television, and I see no reason to modify what I wrote above—if anything, the situation appears to be worse; except for O'Malley, on whom I won't comment, both Clinton and Sanders inhabit a constricted political universe promising continuity in applying the permanent-war doctrine and, on domestic issues, pridefully affirming, rather than transcending, the Obama framework and record of corporatist liberalism.]

As predicted, the flimflam artistry remains in vogue. Clinton is Clinton. Like Cruz, petulant, with suppressed anger and a colossal sense of personal entitlement, she was hiding behind, or else draped herself around, Obama at every turn, at one point even boasting about hours spent in the Situation Room—as on an earlier occasion, just one of the (militarist) boys, a tried and true commander-in-chief in the making. But it was her strident, yet cunningly oblique, defense of Wall Street which most stood out, somehow converting Goldman Sachs into an eleemosynary institution whose high speakers' fees, of which she was a handsome recipient, advanced the work of charity and reform. Clinton, the artful dodger, had a 3-point, 4-point, 5-point, etc., plan for everything, yet the plans themselves, especially the revision of health care, smell to me moldy and accommodative to America's vested interests. Therefore, from a Left perspective, she was indeed vulnerable to attack from an authentic democratic socialist.

None, however, was in attendance, Sanders, to his everlasting shame, also seeking to wear the Obama mantle, particularly on foreign policy, sharing in the demonization of Russia and Putin (Clinton here almost outstripping the Republicans in her macho-brand of power politics, while Sanders dutifully went along with the tide), and in domestic policy, while off to a good start, failed to link Obama and the Democratic party itself sufficiently with Wall Street. Perhaps that is the point: one cannot remain a Democrat and expect to advocate for, much less realize, the democratization of the system of power, its industrial-financial-commercial components, and most fundamental, its militaristic character and purpose. I am all for Sanders's swipe at Wall Street, but it is no more than that, a swipe, a sweeping blow with inadequate follow-up. He is, if not all smoke and mirrors, and certainly not the abominable fakir that Clinton is, nonetheless Sanders is completely out of his element, one foot in the progressive camp, the other on liberal terra firma (I, too, favor the restoration of Glass-Steagall, but even that, without more cogent criticism of the banking structure, is hardly an attack on finance capitalism), liberal terra firma signifying cosmetic changes to the distribution of wealth and power in America.

JANUARY 20, 2016

## **Reptilian Politics and American Leadership: The Party Debates**

The Republicans had at each other, narrowing their candidate field essentially to two, as the remaining incipient fascists desperately tried to attract attention, Rubio notably, with Bush in strangely paralytic or laconic mode, and failed in the effort. This political closure is what happens when the ideological spectrum is so confined that little possibility emerges for distinguishing oneself from the rest, and only the strong of will, Trump and Cruz, survive. Yet I sense real differences between them, Cruz by far the more dangerous, less on policy than on personality, the latter of which could so surcharge policy as to reach Hitlerian proportions in execution. Cruz is a bundle of suppressed anger and resentment, while Trump, as though emerging from Mel Brooks's central casting, is a less resentful, more "here I am, this is what you see," version of a comedic Hermann Goring, hardly outside the confines of totalitarianism, but still human enough to let contrary experiences and thoughts filter in. America in the case of either one would still pursue repression at home and hegemonic militarized goals abroad—a probability with the chief Democratic candidates as well, Clinton's fascistic-inclined demons a perfect match to Cruz's, softened for public consumption by public-relations assistance, and Sanders truly problematic as faux socialism covers over a dreadful foreign policy, support of the gun culture, and, even on health care, backpedalling into the dim light of gradualism. He isn't Trump, but neither is he a clear alternative to him.

I say "reptilian," because of, appearance wise, in Cruz, pythonic eyes, behind which, from what he actually stands for in policy, is a constricting reflex-motion to squeeze out of the body politic any traces of humanitarian regard for others, especially when formulated as a moral obligation of government to serve the people, and in foreign policy, a quintessential ruthlessness based on a take-no-hostages attitude. Nothing squeamish here, across-the-boards. Trump, perhaps to his credit, and to his shame among rank-and-file Republicans, lacks the evangelical-killer instinct in converting every issue into an ideological watershed. He gives no evidence of having despised life, including his own. For Clinton, "reptilian" remains apt (and like Trump, less so for Sanders) in light of her creeping, slithering approach to issues, particularly involving militarism and haute capitalism (Wall Street) and her instinctive love of camouflage (a strong desire for concealment and dislike of transparency, especially in government). She too, like Cruz, goes for the jugular when it comes to perceived enemies, and is equally a vast storehouse of resentments ready to explode when given the opportunity. Sanders, by comparison, is no angel, but his opportunism appears shorn of vindictiveness, thereby allowing him, psychologically, to reach out to people in a more genuine way—the old Democratic schtick of welfare/warfare, that of constructive social welfare programs at home, retention of Cold War policies overseas.

Jonathan Martin and Patrick Healy's NYT article, "At Republican Debate, Taunts and Quips as Rivals Battle," January 15, barely scratches the surface, but does refer in passing to Cruz's attack on Trump for embodying "New York values," Cruz stating, in part, "I think most people know exactly what New York values are: socially liberal, pro-gay marriage, pro-abortion, focused on money and the media." The verbal pus oozes out. One in tune with underlying psychological dynamics, however, wants more, recognizing the hatred behind the politically opportunist examples he cites. And fortunately, the next day, still in Charleston, scene of the debate, we find him speaking to a Conservative Leadership Project (NYT, First Draft, January 16) in which he mock-apologizes for

his dig at Trump in the debate (my initial take was “New York values” was code for anti-Semitism) by enumerating a whole list of grievances: “Now I’m curious. Do the people of South Carolina know what New York values are?” Cruz continues, after first going on Sean Hannity’s show and issuing a news release, in what is an unstoppable gush of bitterness and resentment, incapable of holding back:

“So today, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City all demand I apologize. Who am I to say no? I apologize to the millions of New Yorkers who’ve been abandoned for years by liberal politicians. I apologize to all the hardworking men and women in New York who’d like to have jobs, but Gov. Cuomo has banned fracking. I apologize to all the New Yorkers who are pro-life and pro-marriage and pro-Second Amendment. I apologize to all the small businesses that are fleeing New York City because of the crushing taxes and regulations.”

The reporters: Cruz “also referenced Mr. de Blasio’s past clashes with his own Police Department and proponents of charter schools.” And Cruz ended up, he hoped “that was the apology they were looking for.” Sarcasm, of course, is a thin veneer for something deeper, and Cruz does not disappoint. Above, besides the debater’s trick of linking Trump up to Clinton and de Blasio, his contempt for the word “liberal” is itself a means to affirm environmental rape in close association with unrestricted guns [it turns out, Rubio, Cruz’s ideological near-twin, spent Christmas Eve in Miami conspicuously visiting a gun shop to purchase a pistol!] and an attack on taxes and regulation—together as tight a package of guttural neo-fascism as one is likely to find in national political life. For a Princeton-Harvard Law graduate, this is a bit disappointing, and the Martin-Healy article did not even mention Cruz’s attack, during the debate, on Lawrence Tribe, an essentially moderate, yes “liberal (in contradistinction to radical), constitutional law professor at Harvard. Cruz bottom-feeds on the primitively capitalistic and on eschatological and/or evangelical custodians of the religious system, to Trump’s slightly less zealously-minded, though plebeian-oriented neo-fascist, supporters—between them, a confining range, where temperament may trump (wrong pun) ideological rigidity.

My New York Times Comment on the Martin-Healy article, same date, follows:

When one considers that one of the two major parties put itself on display, the result is indeed depressing, that of a nation on the moral-ideological skids. The in-fighting was revealing of a hard core of Extreme Reaction, a rightward surge not seen since the days of McCarthyism following World War II.

And the people don’t fight back: e.g., Cruz’s attack on Lawrence Tribe will not prompt the Harvard Law faculty, regardless of political persuasion, to protest strongly the red-baiting of one of its graduates. A small detail—NYT, too, subjected to distortion and ridicule [on Cruz’s illegal and devious reporting of a large loan from Goldman Sachs for his 2012 Senate campaign], and in this piece, passing over it lightly.

In truth the Far Right mentalset witnessed last night has become intimidating, or rather, the general response reveals how far the nation has tilted. Dare I say it? We are closer to fascism than perhaps ever before—last night, hooliganism and smearing in full flavor. Each one, with Kasich an exception, trying to outdo the others in proving Rightist credentials, so that, in Trump’s favor, at least, despite his reactionary views, he didn’t appear with the kind of

rehearsed spitefulness and viciousness of his colleagues. Instead, he was matter-of-fact, which leads one to think, he doesn't possess the vengefulness that makes Cruz and Rubio so dangerous, a more strident version of the young Nixon riding the wave of anticommunist hysteria. I fear for America from what I saw and heard.

As of this writing, the Democrats still have their upcoming debate, with Sanders by all reports spurting ahead of Clinton in Iowa and a presumed slugfest in the making. Yet, nothing has really changed, with respect to the fundamental question of the direction of US foreign policy, of determinative importance for the structuring and democratization of American society. Clinton has proven herself a trusted warhorse on national security, with intervention and regime change in her DNA, along with maintaining Obama's Cold War policies of confrontation with China and Russia. As Secretary of State she did not question or even seek to moderate the Pacific-first strategy and related Trans-Pacific Partnership, nor lessen the EU-NATO potential engagement of forces via deployment to the Russian border, all other constants of foreign policy also left largely unchanged with respect to Iran, North Korea, and of course the Middle East, with one-sided preferential treatment of Israel. Sanders here has nothing to offer except more of the same, thus vitiating whatever possibilities of differences he has with her on domestic policy.

Domestic policy is important, but what does it say of a nation that provides better health care at home while destroying the lives of innocent peoples abroad? What does it say, of more stringent corporate regulation at home while actively pursuing market and financial penetration abroad—another false dichotomization of reality in which the forces of wealth-concentration are assisted and continue? Sanders seems a Left-Donald Trump in that he refuses to cut away from American imperialism, and on gun control, Hillary is right (although she is no better) in calling attention to his record. So, we await the Democratic debate, but I suggest that we remain faced with a constipated dialogue between the two major parties; not only are Cruz and Clinton snakelike in their conduct, boa constrictors squashing the life and vitality out of democracy, thereby removing the air from public policy capable of addressing vast inequalities of wealth and power, the continued exacerbation of climate change, and escalating hegemonic claims to global supervision of the political-economic order. Of Trump and Sanders, we can expect if not a carbon copy of their opponents, then replication of the systemic universe which has established ideological boundaries to human creativity in nation-building, leaving us the same problems of international conflict and a social order dependent on expansion to avert stagnation. Trump would militarize capitalism; Sanders would soften the impact. In all four cases, Cruz, Clinton, Trump, Sanders, varying degrees of the law of the jungle would apply, each in readiness to strike at prey deemed harmful to America, Bernie's democratic socialism, to his credit, perhaps narrowing the target-list, but not changing the overall picture of America's combative mental set.

JANUARY 21, 2016

### **Nomenclatural Democracy?: Race (False)-Consciousness**

You want controversy? I'll give you CONTROVERSY: The individual or group stands tall, is fully confident (liberated from feel-good shortcuts for remedying internalized perceptions of injured self-esteem, themselves based on historical-cultural realities of repression, discrimination, even prior servitude), and hence proudly affirms a condition of freedom, identity, and human worth, if

and only if said individual or group removes all public-relations, symbolic, and etymological crutches standing in the way to an emancipated mindset free to combat, with others, systemic conditions responsible for all invidious distinctions in the first place. From a radical standpoint, race is a false social category, precisely because it undermines the actual practice of class, as in the formation of consciousness and the creation and energizing of protest. Race is divisive, as in its practical usage by ruling groups to divide the ranks of working people and set one group against another (the obvious strategy in the South for maintaining segregation for the century following the Civil War—the political formula of southern Populism in response being: You are kept apart, that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. This application of race is only a special case of the tried-and-true method used when- and wherever upper groups feel under pressure from below, the classic promotion of the ethnocentric dodge to prevent the rise of radicalism through the unity of all similarly victimized and dispossessed by the common social system and political economy.

American capitalism owes its longevity and seeming vitality to the we-they dichotomization of people and social forces, racism the fundamental example, with radicalism, in contradistinction to patriotism, a related and closely-following second: in sum, the ideological molding of a stable polity, compliant workforce, and acquiescent populace in general. Where am I leading? To the assertion that the term “Negro” is, far from being a pejorative designation, a relic/reminder of slavery times, instead represents the marching cadence, soul-inspiring declaration, of a whole people in their struggle for human dignity and equality—i.e., collective selfhood as preparation for achieving the universality of humanity. That precisely is what Martin Luther King, Jr., stood for, and precisely what Paul Robeson stood for—listen to the words of one and the songs of the other: Negro, Negro, Negro, not black, Black, Afro-American, African-American, all convenient signifiers by a post Robeson-King generation of posturing “radicals” who have not, like these men, earned their stripes in the social struggle, and worse, have callously sought to erase the historical record of that struggle by a nimble change of terms.

When Dr. King mounted his Poor People’s Campaign toward the end of his life, he was certainly on track in the emphasis of class over race, a natural evolution of his position implicitly critical of capitalism early on, in which his commitment to nonviolence culminated in his opposition to the Vietnam War. But go back to the March on Washington itself, class over race at its most eloquent expression. I was present; I still respond with tears as I quote his words. Listen, a quarter of a million people, placards relating Jobs to Freedom, solemn, heating beating down: “Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children....The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers as evidenced by their presence here today have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.” Yes, the germinating ground for class solidarity, so woefully lacking and perhaps designedly discouraged in present-day America. And Dr. King continued: “No, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.” These will not be separate streams but a unitary flow, propelling forward his dream, one sacred to all who value human rights: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Verily, a



democratic character ascribable to all, of every race, color, creed, democracy incarnate, not the proto-fascistic piffle defining the current political culture and climate.

I cannot hope to convince anyone that our day-sailors of racial emancipation, Negro and white alike, have wrought great damage to the cause of freedom through focusing on race as in fact a diversion from the analysis, criticism, and ultimate displacement of capitalism qua capitalism, a social order which perpetuates racial identity for its own exploitative purposes. The compelling case in point is the Obama Phenomenon, a perfect example of the self-pacification of the Negro community, where silence of a potentially radical constituency has been gained through appeal to racial identity, so that matters of extreme importance, from wealth-concentration and gross inequalities resulting therefrom, to an active agenda of war, intervention, and regime change, are taken off the table, obscured, removed from sight—race therefore a plaything, object of manipulation, for the strengthening the status quo. And what can be done on race can also be done on class, labor rights destroyed and redefined (aka, social patriotism) as a similar process of, to use a Nazi phrase popularized by Goebbels's propaganda machine, "divert the gaze of the masses," in classic obfuscatory ways, ironically, currently the technique of liberalism to advance a corporatist agenda, rather than the straight-out racism and defamation of class propounded by conservatives and reactionaries. Neither liberals nor conservatives want structural clarity, leading to class realignment, democratization, an end to hegemonic goals in foreign policy.

In Sunday's debate, Clinton's cloying attachment to Obama had the twofold purpose of keeping the black community (I do not object to "black," not capitalized, as being interchangeable with "Negro," provided of course, capitalized, consistent usage would refer to European-American, Caucasian-American, or simply White-American, all equivalents of African-American) her loyal support and identifying with his total policy framework as her own. Obama becomes code for favoritism to Wall Street, confrontation with China and Russia, domestic national-security policy of massive surveillance, etc., ad nauseam, with blacks going down-the-line abjectly in support of these developments and now transferring allegiance to Clinton. Talk of false consciousness! I submit that because race-identity has been magnified, not least at the hands of self-promoting black leaders and echoed by white liberals, both using "African-American" as an incantation to demonstrate their putative radicalism (while remaining excessively short on substance), one finds radicalism set back if not permanently then until somehow blacks and whites transcend their respective racial identities for an authentic class alignment which addresses the problems of capitalism.

It is no coincidence that King and Robeson, joined, e.g., by A. Philip Randolph, used the term "Negro," not because they were behind the times—needing a Stokely Carmichael to expose the so-called accommodationist-generation as a means of catching up and embracing a progressive future of Black Power, Black-is-beautiful, and today, Black Lives Matter—but because Dr. King and the others acted with every fiber of their being in dedication to the proposition that ALL human beings were equal, whether under God or deduced from universal moral principles. Not Black Power, but Class Power (and working class at that); not Black-is-beautiful, but all human beings, of whatever color, are beautiful; not Black Lives Matter, but, as Robeson sang out, "white or black or tan, he's my kind of a guy." And if suddenly, gender sensitivities are injected in criticism of the latter, I can only say, gender consciousness, like racial consciousness, is a form of fools-gold, to distract from the beauties of class consciousness, where both genders (and gradations thereof) will live in

harmony and be equal. Equality must not be made subject to subdivision; so long as even a shadow of a doubt exists on that score, ruling groups will have won and be laughing all the way to the bank.

JANUARY 22, 2016

### **Trump-Palin: Dynamic Duo of Fascistic America**



A Trump-Palin ticket (it's too early to tell whether this is a serious prospect, but it represents an idealized political configuration with significant roots in both major parties) would sweep all before it in this blessedly f\*\*\*ed up nation because it unites two principal strands in America's historical political culture and ideology: the veneration of wealth (Trump) and plebeian fascism (Palin), a seemingly unbeatable combination matching the decades-long experience of how US capitalist development evolved into a unilateral global hegemon. For this to occur, it takes, in the words of sainted Ronald Reagan, two to tango, a whirling-dervish kind of dance, nearly out of control in its fast-spinning militarization of policies and values. Upper groups administer (and of course profit from) the social structure, itself built upon the product of their own labor, from war-making to market penetration to, the end-goal, capital accumulation, while working people beginning with the antilabor climate following World War II supplied the shock troops, via their consent to and complicity in furthering a capitalistic-inspired societal process of fascistization, for whom junior partnership (which included support of the Cold War) seemed more attractive than outright suppression. Taft-Hartley, the spiritual and practical undoing of the Wagner Act, pointed to the future, a kept working class, its militancy slowly leached out in the days of red-baiting McCarthyism, anticommunism reified, fructified, so that it had the stuffing knocked out of it. I recall vividly picketing on Boston Common in the late 1950s, against nuclear testing, and, by unwritten code, on behalf of civil rights, when construction workers piled out of the subway, came by, tore up our signs, roughed us up, no police in sight (or on site), the scene driving home to me that American workers would have built crematoria if it meant better-paying jobs.

Such was America then, and I believe now: entrenched wealth/plebeian fascism. If Trump and Palin never existed, we would have had to invent them (the Sartre analysis, in “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” holds equally here, the psychological dynamics of Rightist invention) though as it currently turns out, Cruz and Clinton will do as somewhat imperfect analogues, she, of wealth, he, of plebeian appeal (a more guttural fascism), despite having a hand in the till. It seems that candidates and parties no longer matter, how deeply entrenched authoritarianism has taken hold in the national polity and psyche alike, my image of Thanatosean America propelled by a death-wish of increasing nihilism, as the ground, literally, is being despoiled under us, climate change proceeding on a runaway track, social forces of actual and potential radicalism, if not at each other’s throat, then seemingly incapable of unified CLASS—rather than race, ethnic, and gender—action, all encased in a tightly-woven pattern of political-economic organicism, each constituent knowing its place in the Grand Hierarchy, capitalists, lead and profit, workers aspire and hold constant or sink, a diversely composed underclass suited for military duty or lumpen-proletariat functions of, as now, electing and re-electing the corrupted servants of power: so why not a Trump-Palin ticket, poised for success?

Perhaps America could do no worse, the Democratic party long ago self-castrated by fears of Rightist denunciation (from Truman and Kennedy to the present, willing supplicants at the altar of the Cold War) while producing its own share of billionaires equally to the task of mounting an aggressive foreign policy and, for public consumption, giving monolithic capitalism a liberal patina. Upper wealth possesses a common face, as we marionettes, in spasmodic life-step, jerkily respond below, wired to do its bidding. Conspiracy theory? Hardly; instead, a factual diagram of the structure of wealth and power in America, concentration and consolidation of the socioeconomic framework with its corresponding ideological rationale, undeniable reality when one examines decision-making and its results, wherein party differences have little effect, and indeed are ruled out, where both the conservation, nay, sacral nature, of property and the unimpeded drive for imperialism are involved. America, of course, could do better than Trump and Palin for executing the paradigm of fascism (Obama illustrates the co-optative “liberalism” as a means to that end, although himself a dead giveaway, in my reading of his record, of the fascist inclination, i.e., corporatism plus war), but why bother? One dynamic duo is as good as another, with plenty to draw upon in both parties’ pool.

Politics is no longer the art of the possible, if it ever was (save perhaps during the New Deal), but the craft of the cunning and corrupt, whose career ambitions mesh perfectly with the needs of capitalism, which translates wealth into power and fixes both at the core of the polity. Palin is useful to Trump (her speeches are more off-the-cuff muscular than his) in ramming home the value and legitimacy of force in international relations, and not coddling presumed malcontents in America: paradoxically, an all-powerful State, which eschews the role of government in just about everything that pertains to societal welfare, (of course) taxation, the democratization of class and income—everything, that is, except the capability and actuality of war, in which case government is laudable and, along with business, a suitable object of patriotic devotion. When Palin stated that Trump has “been able to tear the veil off this idea of the system,” this “idea” was not establishment-Republicanism (“He’s been going rogue left and right”) but rather the system per se, its protective democratic rights (whether or not honored), its constitutional foundations. The State will do the bidding of its most powerful forces, and offer explanations—if at all—afterward.

America is in process of speedily being reconstructed (“tear[ing] the veil off”) to yield wealth its just deserts, a world system where friendly dictators need fear nothing by way of intervention or criticism, only arms shipments for their loyalty and favorable investment climate, and where US-defined globalization on all essential matters (subject to our definition) is incontestable, if necessary in making it so through facing off against Russia and China. Just as one of his and her themes is, America does not apologize to anyone (the recent reference to Iran, and noted in her endorsement speech of Trump), our dynamic duo carries belligerence/resentment to lengths, if still exceeded by Cruz and Clinton, which pose a danger obviously to world peace but also, less obvious perhaps, to domestic freedoms of expression and association. The Trump-Palin appeal to libertarians, the other side of the coin to evangelicals, is hollow, pure malarkey, as repression (e.g., closing the borders) would take on a self-justifying life of its own. Grimly, there is little assurance things would be better or different in Democratic hands.

JANUARY 25, 2016

### **Regulatory Farce: Internal Capitalist Hegemony**

Privatization is historically inscribed in America’s structural-ideological DNA, solidly entrenched, near-impossible to dislodge, ever since (if not before) John Locke’s formulation, only confirming the trend lines from enclosures, to mercantilism, to nascent capitalism, of the antecedent rights of property over government and society. In the righteous world of capitalism property trumps all before it, and for America, doubly true given its essential start as a New World tableau in which feudal institutions were comparatively absent, leaving capitalism to grow free from the premodern obstacles making for more complex polities and political-social philosophies. As Louis Hartz proclaimed, in *The Liberal Tradition in America*, America was born capitalistic, it did not have to make itself so. Hartz may have had mixed feelings about that, advantages outweighing disadvantages, but my use of “farce”—ridiculous or empty show (one of Webster’s meanings)—suggests for me a systemic-cultural VOID when it comes to the social dimensions of human rights, the vitality of the multifaceted human personality not become transmogrified by commodity fetishism (Marx) into an accumulating/possessive animal valuing separation and competitive antagonism over mutuality and social cooperation.

We are what we are, having been made so by centuries in the promotion of (in-)human rights and societal privileges, freedom given the restricted meaning associated with life conditions of being free to prosper, free to sweat at low wages, free, ultimately, to starve, freedom replaced by the coded word LIBERTY (the darling of every rightwing appellation) signifying the amended meaning of freedom plus the ruthless individualistic ethos of subjugating all before one, from Indigenous People, to black slaves (chattel slavery narrowly shaped as a capitalistic institution complementing and integral to the national political economy), to tenants and sharecroppers on the land, to industrial workers, to ... fill-in the blank, whether unemployed, criminalized, ghettoized, you name it, a capitalism that feeds on, indeed nurtures, authoritarian submission.

What is absent from American Capitalism is any safeguarding of the public interest, any concept of a public sphere of government competence and jurisdiction, or go further, any notion of the public qua public, all-of-us as having basic rights under the fundamental law. Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities* is child’s-play as compared with the division of wealth and power in America. How

then expect a regulatory system to curb the influence and social-control possibilities of capital in America? The setting is inimical to any but hardline profiteering, unrestrained by the State, whose own function is interpreted as assisting, by military means internationally and at home if and when necessary, the political-economic process of wealth-making in private hands, not, therefore, wealth-creation to serve public ends, i.e., the needs of the people. Everything points to inequality as the ratifying condition of American liberty, freedom a suspicious word of no-doubt communist origin.

Sounds rhetorical, an empty indictment, one undeserved and historically false? The regulatory function of government is at the nerve-center of the realization of human rights. A privatized system of regulation may seem oxymoronic (in fact, it is!), yet that is the reality, government turned inside-out, to serve the groups tearing apart the societal fabric, profiting from their own control of the levers of authority and command of force, an hierarchical framework cemented together by the enforced dependence of the working class and poor on the ever-evolving and tightening pattern, now assuming US-defined globalized proportions, of corporate-monopoly organization sector-by-sector, financial, industrial, commercial, as though private government shielded by the thin layer of legitimacy of government proper, obfuscation on a grand scale insofar as the commonweal is concerned. Government of course is still needed: to fight wars, expand capitalism, ensure domestic social stability via engendering a permanent atmosphere of redbaiting and keeping tabs on dissent; but in its public function it stops at the water's edge of the business system.

The history is clear: the major railroads were instrumental in forming the Interstate Commerce Commission, to ensure against internecine competition; then the transition point to a privatized public regulation in TR's Bureau of Corporations, a House of Morgan creation (Roosevelt's role as trustbuster another meaning of farce, broadly satirical comedy and improbable plot); ditto, and more important, creation of the Federal Reserve System under Woodrow Wilson, banker-dominated, shaped, engineered from first to last by the leading banks, their operations now synchronized with government Treasury and broader financial policy; not to skip a beat, Herbert Hoover's leadership of the trade-association movement, which privatized for good and all the monopolistic system and impetus to foreign markets, technically, still private, but utterly reliant on government assistance and support; from there to more explicitly modern business structure, with FDR's National Recovery Administration and its code authorities sanctioning monopoly-concentration across the board (what makes the New Deal different, however, is that he also used government for public ends, a difficult balancing act in which Hugh Johnson faces, e.g., Henry Wallace, Harold Ickes, Harry Hopkins, and we find the magnificent experiment in human conservation of the Works Progress Administration and other programs and projects); and coming rapidly up to the present, a miasma of sell-out, betrayal, conniving with the culprits supposedly to be prosecuted for violating the public interest, in microcosm just the last few weeks alone, Interior/FBI/Bureau of Land Management, in Oregon, where armed insurrection is left untouched, a longstanding fear of enforcing the public interest on the public lands; the various agencies charged with maintaining the public health, EPA in particular, in Michigan, where switching the Flint water supply to a noxious river system in order to save a few bucks (under a governor-appointed manager superseding local authority), an austerity-driven move of fiscal-responsibility leaving children permanently deformed and learning-disabled because of the lead content of the water (the state's own regulatory body, Department of Environmental Quality, along with its governor, turning the other cheek until it is too late); finally the highway banditry of the pharmaceutical industry, cozied up by the Food and Drug Administration, again among other agencies, which has left drugs to treat life-threatening disease

and illness at prices so high as to be out of public reach, a heartless victimization of the sick, criminal in inspiration and mindset yet allowed to continue under government purported regulation.

Other capitalist countries have achieved a closer approximation to the public welfare, perhaps because of a more variegated historical past and consequent richer political culture in the present, so that authentic regulation in the people's interest is not impossible under capitalism. Somewhat difficult and liable to change, but not impossible. Not so, America, its essentially antidemocratic history, stylized as democracy, having a built-in repudiation of the public realm. The regulators themselves have on the whole excelled in self-promotion, their duties and actual performance an open sesame through the revolving-door principle to lucrative jobs in industry, banking, business, what appears at the outset as mastering the art of trained INCAPACITY even to serve the public interest. EPA, FDA, BLM, an alphabet soup of privatized tyranny, integrated into a bureaucratic web thickened to disguise the ongoing dirty work of wealth-accumulation by which America defines its greatness.

JANUARY 27, 2016

### **Flint: Genocide by Design**

America is in the business of killing off its presumed undesirables, conversely, playing favorites with those it admires. In simplistic terms, this comes down to race; yet race is code for other factors that transcend racial boundaries, so that whites as well as blacks are in the crosshairs of capitalism when these factors come into play: poverty, radicalism, vanishing industry, all three conspicuous in Flint's historical-cultural-industrial setting. Flint is a loser by American standards because it is predominantly black, is associated with labor militancy (heritage of the Sit-Down strikes), and, as determined by corporate giantism, no longer the green pastures sought by the automotive industry in its search for high profits. Still more basic, Flint is an ideal scapegoat in the structural context of internal colonialism, a throwaway appendage serving foremost as an example of America's powers, at home and abroad, to inflict pain and induce submission as a testimony to its own lofty purpose and rectitude as a Conquering Nation. Exceptionalism comes to Michigan with a vengeance, enjoying the full cooperation of federal, state, and local government in the city's plight of social misery.

Results can be achieved without conscious planning. Societal phenomena do not just happen, but when a nation's governing institution, political economy, and ideology converge, which is usually the case, a framework has been established for how people's lives are managed, what they are expected to think, and the mechanisms for social control instated to ensure stability. In Flint's case, the relative abandonment of its manufacturing base already served to discipline its population into fatalistic quiescence. Michael Moore lived to fight back, but not many more did. From all sides, the smell of the kill grew more acute, more enticing, Flint, a micro-Detroit too large to knock down and bring to its knees. Detroit is becoming gentrified piece by piece, Flint, however, too far gone for that purpose, and hence readied for the assault, the rape of its once-proud identity as a working-class true biracial town truly a red flag to the American bull[y] and logical target for the hate-driven ethnocentrism red-baiting/race-baiting characterizing the American mindset. Flint is like Minsk, too remote to worry about, yet under the surface fit for demonizing because somehow, dimly, representing the enemy, an alien existence.

When the switch was made in the water supply the EPA as a matter of course, given the source would be the Detroit River, should have demanded and enforced a rigid protocol backed by daily testing; the city health department and state Department of Environmental Quality, ditto in support of that effort; and the governor from day one on top of the situation. In my mind's eye I thought of an ideal experiment, simultaneous steps to introduce a toxic supply into the water systems of Flint and Traverse City, the latter white, privileged, good vibes emanating from its recreational image. If the lead content in the young children of Flint had been found in the children of Traverse City, would months of inaction, deceptions, outright lies, culminating in the governor's faux-apology to the state legislature have in the latter case happened or even been allowed? No, racism does not fully explain what happened in, and to, Flint, contemptuous dismissal of the class enemy, who signified an obstacle to enhanced capitalist development via relocated plants, outsourcing, the weakening of labor, all consistent with a primordial racism which no longer requires identification and expression, and, relatedly, the go-ahead signal to capitalism to make self-aggrandizing decisions with impunity, no explanations offered.

Meanwhile, the people of Flint, to all intents defeated, have not fought back, instead falling into despair or numbness. This is a battle of Cynical Triumph, enough criminal behavior spread out around the table so that no-one feels—or is to be judged—implicated. That children will bear the physical results and learning disabilities of contaminated water and contaminated measures of contaminated policy makers up and down the line is understood and explained by the classic evasion of monstrous evil: *deus ex machina*, as though introduced by God from heaven or, in Webster's, as introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty. No-one takes real responsibility, a self-castrating exercise of both political parties, state and nation. Here it is instructive to look at Paul Krugman's NYT article, (Jan. 25), typical liberal tripe, as opposed to radical analysis, fed from the bowels of a dead carcass—American freedom—to an adoring, again liberal, public and readership.

He sets up a promising background: "In the 1850s, London, the world's largest city, still didn't have a sewer system. Waste simply flowed into the Thames.... But conservatives...opposed any effort to remedy the situation. After all, such an effort would involve increased government spending and, they insisted, infringe on personal liberty and local control." Of course, familiar, except that the position is not exclusive to conservatives. Obama's visit to Detroit led to brief reference to sadness for the affected children in Flint, crocodile tears when it came to remedies beyond a small allocation of federal funds, while Snyder, in his State of the State Address, did little more: to deplore a situation, partly of one's own making, is an empty *mea culpa* when not accompanied by substantive change, criminal charges, especially directed against those who manipulated data and failed to carry out their responsibilities (himself, on the latter, a suitable candidate), and dealing forthrightly with health issues. Krugman: "It took the Great Stink of 1858, when the stench made the Houses of Parliament unusable, to produce action." 158-odd years later, the Michigan legislature has still not kept up with its Great Stink, almost from day one of the supply switch, discoloration and foul odor of the water was noted by residents—with nothing done.

To his credit, Krugman a) recognizes that an essential public principle is being violated, and b) sees Flint itself in a more general context. "Modern politicians, no matter how conservative, understand that public health is an essential government role. Right? No, wrong—as illustrated by the disaster in Flint, Mich." The chain of guilt extended far and wide: "What we know so far is that

in 2014 the city's emergency manager—appointed by Rick Snyder, the state's Republican governor—decided to switch to an unsafe water source, with lead contamination and more, in order to save money. And it's becoming increasingly clear that state officials knew that they were damaging public health, putting children in particular at risk, even as they stonewalled both residents and health experts." Nevertheless, he omits mention of liberals and Democrats, not just conservatives and Republicans, as obviously derelict or complicit—too, health experts who could have daily taken samples of the water and, the lead content discovered, children's blood samples as well. Where I credit Krugman is on his generalization: "This story—America in the 21st century, and you can trust neither the water nor what officials say about it—would be a horrifying outrage even if it were an accident or an isolated instance of bad policy. But it isn't. On the contrary, the nightmare in Flint reflects the resurgence in American politics of exactly the same attitudes that led to London's Great Stink more than a century and a half ago."

Then he caves in, superbly revealing the limitations of liberalism, and—hopefully not a cheap shot—how the Nobel Prize in Economics is rewarded, i.e., keep it straight, avoid stepping on capitalism's toes, be respectful and respectable: in this case, take the high ground and avoid controversy by narrowing the boundaries of what it is legitimate to discuss: "Let's back up a bit, and talk about the role of government in an advanced society." Yes, let's, and in order to see the antiradical core of liberalism, elimination of VALUES wherever possible. "In the modern world," he writes, "much government spending goes to social insurance programs—things like Social Security, Medicare and so on, that are supposed to protect citizens from the misfortunes of life." One would have thought, no argument, applause from liberals! He continues: "Such spending is the subject of fierce political debate, and understandably so." Now in retreat: "Liberals want to help the poor and unlucky, conservatives want to let people keep their hard-earned income, and there's no right answer to this debate, because it's a question of values."

I submit that Flint and all that it represents is a test of liberalism, and not merely conservatism. How much courage does it take to affirm social insurance programs? And go further, seek their fuller democratization, rather than beg off on grounds of inconclusiveness? Liberal exquisite-ness of argumentation and analysis can go only so far before its emptiness is revealed—here the distinction between "public goods" and the social welfare: "There should, however, be much less debate about spending on what Econ 101 calls public goods—things that benefit everyone and can't be provided by the public sector." The trouble is, all that makes for a life which is safe, healthy, amicable, non-exploitative, can and should be considered public goods, not just those wherein values may be evident to the supposedly objective-minded economist. Democracy is a value; freedom is a value; taking a stand on the utter legitimacy of both, and working toward their fuller, more comprehensive achievement, is not grounds for ruling them out as public goods. Many things "benefit everyone," militarism not being one of them, nor crumbling infrastructure, another. Instead, the circle narrows, as though only a priori things will do: "Yes, we can differ over exactly how big a military we need or how dense and well-maintained the road network should be, but you wouldn't expect controversy about spending enough to provide key public goods like basic education or safe drinking water."

Nor would you expect the analyst/observer to hide behind basic education and safe drinking water, in order to escape from taking a stand on military-influenced capitalism and suffocation of the social safety net, let alone myriad other vital issues, such as socialized medicine—there I've



said it (rather than the single-payer system)—instead of the for-profit Affordable Care Act. I surmise Krugman is a person of good will, a convinced liberal, who finds radicalism abhorrent as much as reaction, in which case ideological myopia still colors the analysis and confines his attention to attacking the Right without reckoning that the Center and Right have melded, as witness everything Obama and the Clintons represent, and together constitute shock troops for advanced capitalism and unilateral global dominance. Those poor conservatives: “Yet a funny thing has happened as hard-line conservatives have taken over many U.S. state governments. Or actually, it’s not funny at all. Not surprisingly, they have sought to cut social insurance spending on the poor. In fact, many state governments dislike spending on the poor so much that they are rejecting a Medicaid expansion that wouldn’t cost them anything, because it’s federally financed.” To summarize, Krugman finds Flint to be “an all too typically American situation of (literally) poisonous interaction between ideology and race, in which small-government extremists are empowered by the sense of too many voters that good government is simply a giveaway to Those People.”

Race is undoubtedly in the mix, but the ideology runs deeper than small-government extremists imposing their will on an equally resentful, frustrated electorate; all of America, its history, its current practice, is implicated in the poisoning of Flint.

JANUARY 28, 2016

### **Corporate Inversion: The American Way**

Advanced capitalism is, increasingly, an international system, subdivided into consanguineous blocs, such as the EU, or given practical implementation, as in NAFTA and the still-negotiated TPP, but in reality the dominant political economies, although benefiting from, indeed, defining and structuring, cross-border flows of financial, industrial, and commercial activities, relations, and investments, use these arrangements in order to develop an independent power base and thus strike out unilaterally on the world scene for achieving global economic dominance. The internationalization of capitalism is true so far as it goes, remaining qualified at the outset by intra-capitalist rivalries classically embedded in the imperialist paradigm (for which alliance-systems provide a subduing or mitigating factor), but in its upper reaches capitalism, America the prime and virtually singular example, rests on national foundations, not least because of the locus of preponderant ownership and, greasing the wheels, a formidable military protective force in promoting expansion. America is 21st century capitalism in extremis, i.e., not so much in heightened form, as rather near the point of death (Webster’s), postponement or avoidance of which necessitates desperate moves, seemingly, but not really, noneconomic in origins, as in a broadly counterrevolutionary posture intended to shape the international order to its liking and in conformity with its ideology of unrestrained capitalism, antiradicalism, and the nuts-and-bolts policy constants of war, intervention, and regime change. On that score alone, America in the present-day is already conspicuous for its historical-structural corporatism, a systemic near-replication of what in the first-half of the 20th century had been tried and adopted in German, Italian, and Japanese fascism, where the lines between the State and Capitalism were removed in a unitary framework of government-business interpenetration.

I call that fascism, stripped of emotive content, and without necessarily invoking the existence of the concentration camp and gas chamber, because the telling feature in all of this, beyond an obviously militaristic mindset grounded in an hierarchical structure of status and power, is the corporatization of the total society: capitalism at the heart of the polity, that for which all of life is meant to serve. Capitalism and polity conterminous, no longer simply interpenetration of the two but an identity of structure and interest. America has carried this integrative process of a private-public conflation further than any other advanced capitalist power, state capitalism no longer a sufficient designation, or even capitalist state, but the state as the outer covering for capitalism proper, revealing its militaristic potential and hegemonic aspirations, tightly-bundled in a national context the better for the public realm to activate the private, inculcate patriotic devotion and submission in the people, and—bluntly—keep order. Meanwhile, capitalism’s systemic wish-list (Marxists may fall back on integral tendencies, but I prefer the more active role of ruling groups in guiding and establishing boundaries for capitalist development, hence, an indictment of class rule, if that should ever be possible if and when working people get their act together) takes on, in America, an accelerated pace for completing the agenda of utmost and complete concentration and consolidation of the corporate form. America, Inc., a land of loyal employees, compliant consumers, obedient politicians, organized, synchronized, to reflect an imperative command structure dedicated to one end, the System itself.

Nominally, corporate inversion is an accounting trick realized through mergers and acquisitions to evade taxation. Why be satisfied with the myriad loopholes, corporate executives are asking themselves, and the opportunities for taking write-offs, built into the tax code, whose top rate of 35% is seldom, very seldom, charged, half that rate more typically, making a progressive tax system a misnomer (clearly one that is regressive, even as compared to that of individuals, in the higher altitudes), when you can have TAX EVASION altogether?! Let’s stay with corporate inversion in its simple technical usage, then look briefly as above at a Capitalist Polity, the State its mere appendage: to fight its wars (trade wars included), provide bailouts for its business and banking failures, and steady its volatile stock market, based on everything from gambling blind-folded to manipulation via insider trading. To gain an overview of corporate inversion, I turn to the NYT DealBook section, Andrew Ross Sorkin’s article, “A Tidal Wave of Corporate Migrants Seeking (Tax) Shelter,” January 26, an apt title; not migrants like the Joad family in the Grapes of Wrath forced off the land and seeking opportunities perhaps in the city, but multibillion dollar entities voluntarily migrating overseas to save vast sums on their tax bills, havens the Joads will never see.

Sorkin has no illusions about the evasion tactic—this is about Johnson Controls, shock troops for the automotive industry in securing corporate bailouts, while ultimately greatly profiting for itself. “In the fall of 2008,” he writes, “with General Motors and Chrysler on the precipice of bankruptcy, executives at the car parts supplier Johnson Controls flew to Washington. The company’s president testified before a Senate panel and implored lawmakers to bail out the auto industry.” Yes, what’s good for GM (and Johnson Controls) is good for America, Keith Wandell, the latter’s president, warned that “the failure of even one automobile company would ‘implode’ the supply chain and lead to broad job losses.” We’ve heard that song before, and since—chiefly with financials; Congress gave GM and Chrysler “a bailout plan worth almost \$80 billion,” Johnson and other suppliers were saved, and Johnson’s CEO in 2010 received a salary of \$15 million. So far so good, for here we get a glimpse of corporate patriotism at its zenith. Sorkin writes: “Despite the federal government’s rescue—and hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks over the last several

decades from states like Michigan and Wisconsin—Johnson Controls said on Monday [Jan. 25] it was renouncing its United States corporate citizenship by selling itself to Tyco International, based in Ireland, a deal struck in large part to reduce its tax bill, which it said should drop by about \$150 million annually.”

Not unusual; here he briefly recites the honor role of tax evasion: The announcement “is just the latest effort by corporate America to flee the United States. In the last year, Pfizer said it was leaving for Ireland, as did Medtronic, the medical device maker. [More on both of these below] Coca-Cola’s largest bottling company, after selling its domestic operations, is heading to Britain.” In fact, the stampede is on, and has been in this form for at least a quarter-century, under Democratic and Republican administrations, with no resistance offered. The dynamics of what amounts to bottom-fishing, here for the lowest taxes, applies still earlier to outsourcing and lowering the labor cost of manufacturing, capitalism dedicated to cheapening every thing in sight except its own profits (the foregoing, mine, not Sorkin’s). To his credit, he states that until the tax code is reformed [wishful thinking, at best], “we will continue to see an exodus of American companies from our shores in search of a lower tax rate.” And he finds that “based on a series of conversations with investment bankers, there are probably at least another dozen deals of meaningful size being negotiated in the pipeline.” I might add, if genuinely reformed, the tax code would probably produce a universal stampede of “corporate migration,” his idea of reform being what the Treasury has approved (but I think easily gotten around), “a rule that an American company could not complete an inversion if it owned more than 60 per cent of the combined company; Johnson Controls will own 56 per cent of the combined company.”

Hmmm, how did it just come under the wire? In another NYT DealBook article, “Tyco Merger Will Shift Johnson Controls’ Tax Liability Overseas,” (Jan. 25), Leslie Picker explains the careful calculation made to legitimize the inversion. She begins: “One of the first big mergers of the new year resembles a number of other deals in recent years in one crucial respect: It will allow an American corporation to move its headquarters to a country where corporate taxes are lower.” Johnson, now combining with Tyco, “will relocate its headquarters from Milwaukee to Cork, Ireland, where Tyco is domiciled and where corporate taxes are lower than in the United States.” The reputed savings in annual tax payments, the combined companies announced, is at least \$150 million. (Picker notes that the Johnson Controls-Tyco combination “is the 13th such deal to be announced in the last 16 months, according to data compiled by Dealogic.”)

Still, how did the deal get beyond the Treasury rule, where “shareholders are required to own less than 60 percent of the joint entity to pass muster for an inversion”? We left the matter at 54%-46%, and Sorkin points to some streamlining by both companies, and adds, “Right before the merger, Tyco will conduct a reverse stock split, whereby Tyco shareholders will receive a ratio of 0.955 shares for each of their existing Tyco shares.” If this seems too technical, as it does for me, Kevin Allison, also NYT DealBook, (Jan. 25), explains the mechanics of the deal, so as to satisfy Treasury guidelines: “In a complex deal that smacks of late-cycle merger action, Johnson’s own shareholders are being handed \$3.9 billion in cash to reduce the share count to levels that allow a shift of tax domicile to happen.” Everyone is happy, Congress, Treasury, the respective shareholders (“Johnson is in effect paying roughly \$1.4 billion above Tyco’s market value on Friday [Jan. 22]” to keep within the prescribed limits set for inversion, here Tyco owners, “hold 44 per cent of the combined company and therefore collect nearly half of any additional upside.”

Picker quotes Robert Olson, chief financial officer of Tyco, who said: “We’re well within the guidelines that the I.R.S. has established, so we feel really good on it.” Well he might, for we learn also in Picker’s article that Tyco is quite a good candidate for the Corporate Good Citizen Award (my fictional creation): It changed corporate headquarters several times (one step ahead of the law?) doing its first “inversion in 1997 by acquiring ADT Ltd., and moving its headquarters to Bermuda.” Then, “in 2009 shareholders voted to shift Tyco’s headquarters to Switzerland, and then five years later to Cork, Ireland.” A veritable Baedeker guide to Theft in the Grand Manner; fittingly, the company, started in 1960 as a small research outfit with government connections, later “growing into an industrial giant through a series of diverse acquisitions,” in the early 2000s “was marred in scandal when Dennis Kozlowski, its CEO, was convicted of looting the company.” Such is the nature of capitalism, of corporate tax evasion, of inversion; “since then, the company has been broken up several times.” Its market valuation, as of last week, was \$13 billion, and S. & P.’s Capital IQ show projects its 2016 revenue at \$9.7 billion. Nor is Johnson suffering; it “will receive about \$3.9 billion in cash from the transaction, for which Tyco has secured about \$4 billion in financing.” Added to that the savings effected in evasion (oops, inversion) and we have a good day’s work. The usual helpers, Barclays, Lazard, Goldman, provided further zest to the whole operation.

The foregoing is a useful case study, not least because of its recency, alerting us to corporate depredations going on under our very noses. But there are many others, and sticking to the recent timeline I’d like to look at two, Pfizer and Medtronic, poster candidates for the dynamics of inversion. Medtronic goes back to mid-2014. It agreed, according to NYT analyst, Michael de la Merced, in his article, “Device Maker Medtronic Agrees to Merger and Will Move to Ireland,” (June 15), “to buy Covidien for \$42.9 billion, combining two of the world’s biggest medical device makers and helping Medtronic lower some taxes by gaining access to cash held overseas.” Never mind the obvious in all of these multibillion dollar transactions, in which anti-trust law and consequent prosecution are and have been for some time dead letters, for we see the interesting point that overseas cash holdings/profits are safely sheltered, even though, and when, they are reinvested back in the US. Merced writes: “The deal, which is being structured as a so-called inversion, will relocate Medtronic from its headquarters in Minneapolis to Covidien’s corporate home in Ireland, where the tax rate is significantly lower than in the United States. But Medtronic argues that its tax rate will remain roughly the same, at about 18 percent.” This is still absurdly low, given the size and scope of the merger, particularly when one notes Medtronic’s advantage of enjoying, like Pfizer as well, assorted protections of US law, such as patent rights, access to the American stock market, etc. The deal isn’t small: “Together, the two companies will become one of the biggest providers of medical devices in the industry, with 87,000 employees in over 150 countries.” At the time, the deal was “the biggest-ever foreign acquisition by an American company,” surpassing “Kraft’s \$19.5 billion takeover” of Britain’s Cadbury.

Although US corporations claim to be at a competitive disadvantage headquartered in the US, where corporate tax rates are allegedly high, Merced points out that American tax laws “allow companies to move their corporate headquarters under certain circumstances [none seems unduly restrictive, if at all], leading to a growing wave of inversions.” The refrain, repeated ad nauseam by every CEO in corporate flight, that this is not about lowering (i.e., evading) taxes, can be seen in the statement of Omar Ishrak, Medtronic’s chair, ““Although this is an inversion deal, it’s not about lowering tax rates,”” claiming instead, and correctly, without I think denying the other, that

“Medtronic can get access to the free cash flow that Covidien generates and deploy it in the U.S.” So, even though Covidien shareholders will have only 30 percent of the combined company, thus well within Treasury regulations, Medtronic has married a cash cow and is happily ensconced in Ireland while, with these reserves, enlarging its business in America.

Finally, there is Pfizer, a granddaddy of global pharmaceuticals, voracious in its appetite/skilled in its aptitude, for profits, maker of Lipitor, Viagra, and Botox, the Holy Grail of the American lifestyle, and if that isn't enough to win our admiration, then sheer size earns the respect of every right-thinking capitalist. Its journey leading up the events of today has not been easy, for in mid-2014 it attempted to merge with AstraZeneca and was unceremoniously rebuffed. NYT reporter Jenny Anderson has the story, “Pfizer Abandons Bid for AstraZeneca,” (May 24, 2014), affording insight into its corporate strategy to follow. She writes, “On the final day for Pfizer to decide whether to abandon the plan, it said it did not intend to make an offer for AstraZeneca.” Its final offer was rejected the previous week, I gather to Pfizer's dismay: “The cash-and-stock bid, which valued AstraZeneca at about \$19 billion [more than generous, it seems], would have created the world's largest drug company.” Pfizer thinks big, it also thinks about favorable “tax domiciles,” words often appearing from all sides. Ian Read, its chair, is direct: “We continue to believe that our final proposal was compelling and represented full value for AstraZeneca.... As we said from the start, the pursuit of this transaction was a potential enhancement to our existing strategy.” He is not shy about the tax-saving rationale for corporate inversion, nor the cash accumulated for global investment via lower rates. One reason AstraZeneca held back was its belief that it finally had “promising new drugs” in the pipeline (read: predators going for the jugular), in this case, “MEDI4736, a lung cancer drug that...could be worth as much as \$6 billion in peak annual sales.”

Welcome to the world of pharmaceuticals. Jumping forward to mid-November, 2015, Pfizer again on the (corporate) prowl, we see Jeff Sommer's article in the “Your Money” section of The Times, entitled, “A Tax-Cutting Move That Pfizer Can Hardly Resist,” (Nov. 14, 2015), which is like a gunshot blast: “Give Pfizer, the giant drug maker, points for boldness and persistence: The company has bravely put ‘tax inversions’ back in the headlines.” We are now up to the preliminaries with the Allergan merger: “Pfizer, which already holds roughly \$140 billion overseas and is quite skillful at minimizing its taxes, is considering a deal that could move its legal tax headquarters from New York to Dublin, where it could save bundles more.” Sommers notes that Pfizer tried unsuccessfully the previous year for a “tax inversion,” and that “from a purely financial viewpoint, tax inversions make sense for companies like Pfizer,” or in other words, amoral cynicism rules the roost and one cannot expect otherwise (mine, not Sommers). Enter Allergan: “Last month [Oct., 2015], the company revealed that it was engaged in merger talks with Allergan, a smaller pharmaceutical company that operates in New Jersey but has already shifted its own tax domicile to Ireland through a tax-inversion merger.” Before Pfizer, Allergan was already in the game, perhaps ready, with its Irish tax domicile, for the next fish. Again, Ian Read. Yes, some in Congress are upset (Jack Reed of Rhode Island, to his everlasting credit) about the inversion, but so what, for Read on Oct. 27 said in a conference call: “The shareholders of Pfizer expect us to maximize the return, and the employees of Pfizer want to have a robust, successful company in the future. To be successful in the future, we need to have a competitive tax rate.”

Off to Dublin, still of course leaving the actual headquarters and operations in America intact. It is significant that Ian Read is an accountant (perhaps the coming occupational training ground for

corporate CEOs), and Sommer notes, “Pfizer represents a textbook case of complex global accounting.” What is meant here, besides sophisticated tax evasion? Perhaps nothing, except that, he goes on, Pfizer “has been deftly exploiting tax anomalies for years, yet it is evidently convinced that it can do even better with a foreign tax address.” Taxation raises the question of, if not gives birth to, the multinational corporation, an argument raised (in its favor) by Roman Weil, University of Chicago professor emeritus, the Booth School of Business, whose textbook, “Financial Accounting,” 14th edition, praises Pfizer to the hilt for its “unexceptionable” work. Weil reasons (?) that US multinationals are wary about repatriating foreign profits: “It’s not surprising,” he writes, “that companies like Pfizer and G.E. want to keep those dollars abroad so they don’t have to pay those [US] taxes [which he estimates at 25%]. Sommer is quick with his rejoinder: Pfizer claims 25% as its “effective tax rate,” yet, he observes, “if you’re not an accountant, that phrase, ‘effective tax rate,’ may not mean what you think it does. It’s not what the company actually pays.... When, if ever, Pfizer would pay enough to reach 25 percent is far from clear.”

Wonderful, the clouds part. Pfizer “has sheltered \$74 billion by holding it overseas and declaring that the money will remain abroad ‘indefinitely.’” Although the US government “taxes companies on their worldwide income, it doesn’t collect on earnings that remain abroad,” and in parentheses, further, and importantly, he writes: “Pfizer might be able to use its overseas cash in a merger with a foreign-domiciled company, like Allergan [the deal has not been consummated yet]. That could enable Pfizer to declare itself an Irish corporation, easing its tax problems.” Ireland, I toast thee, the leprechaun of monopoly capital, a hiding place of treasure, elf pledged not to reveal its location. One need only add: “On top of that \$74 billion, Pfizer keeps an additional, unspecified amount abroad,” which Sommer calculates as another \$70 billion. Our good Professor Weil thinks “tax domiciles abroad” can be advantageous to the US, encouraging multinationals to invest at home: “They might be more inclined to do so, he said, because they could book earnings abroad and bring the money back to America ‘without incurring that additional United States tax.’” In all of this, we see academic whoredom falling into step: Edward Kleinbard, former chief of staff of the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, and now professor of law and business at Southern Cal, takes the position that “the morality of tax inversions was not an issue that C.E.O.s should even be expected to address. In his words, “There is a moral imperative here, but it falls on the shoulders of Congress, not on corporations.” Corporate self-interest, Sommer paraphrase, is an “economic model in place now,” and, again, Kleinbard, “If the results are plainly inconsistent with the national interest, Congress has to fix things [which in buck-passing fashion, he is certain it will not]. We shouldn’t expect the corporate community to hold itself to values higher than the marketplace.” A fitting epitaph for America.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to go beyond the factual material to a theoretical conclusion about the nature of corporatism, and corporate inversion as the deconstruction of an atavistic demand for profits, militarism, conquest, all resting on a submissive populace that transforms the human being into a commodity, and capitalism, far from being a political economy, takes on the dimensions of the State itself insofar as organizing the structure of social relations and keeping the people in a condition of somnambulant regimentation. The merger has now been effected, we can all rest at ease.

JANUARY 29, 2016

## **Domestic War Criminals: A People's Court**

Criminal behavior, when legitimated by the State, introduces a new legal category, a variant of the time-honored crime of treason to one's own country, properly, a crime against humanity, turned inward, fully sanctioned by Constitution, law, and custom. Michigan has declared war on Flint, a take-no-prisoners reign of terror all perfectly NORMAL, and hence, until now, difficult to detect and/or oppose. As with practically all crimes committed under the name of law and order, the victim becomes the culprit, the perpetrator, the well-meaning administrator guilty of at most poor judgment while presumably addressing more pressing issues. That is where we're at, in 2016, although actually long in the making, in state and nation alike. This whole area of judicial determination is, of course, off-limits and non-existent, and hence continues in the name of law-and-order, stability, even progress.

Michigan is no worse than America, Governor Snyder merely a replica in miniature of President Obama; one presides over the killing of individuals on a global basis, the other, a local basis—done with the detachment and coldness of an Eichmann, a necessary reserve for conveying the idea of respectability wrapped in the cloak of office and the expected deference of a citizen base. Whether murdering children through official acts by means of drone assassination, or by means of poisoned water the outcome of decisions in place to serve a particular agenda, it does not matter, for the result is the same: infanticide, usually extended to cover collateral damage as well, a civilian population at the mercy of authoritative force. Flint is a useful illustration of the transmission of totalitarianism downward, the atmosphere of criminality at the highest levels making possible, thinkable, executable, drawing inspiration from the creative fount of lawful lawlessness, behavioral patterns otherwise unacceptable in a society governed by democratic norms.

We look to Burns, Oregon as an example of insurrection, when the real insurrection on a far wider scale is committed by government itself (revolt against a civil authority or established government, therefore America a revolt against itself, a festering self-destructiveness founded on destruction of others, the weak, the poor, the marginalized, whether at home or abroad) in Flint, as chapter one in the concerted attack on working people and racial minorities, often the same. Flint did not have to happen, and that it has happened compels a need to know and suitable punishment. But how punish Barack Obama for promoting war, intervention, regime change, in addition, CIA and paramilitary forces at the ready, for opportunities the US seeks or creates along these lines (military bases in, at one count, 147 countries, a military budget snuffing out the chances of a decent, viable, social safety net), when this record represents the history, expectations, again, normality, of citizens and government alike? And how punish Rick Snyder for promoting class war, racial division, deepening impoverishment, in addition, lifetime human deprivation as children grow to adulthood with diminished IQs, physical defects, disease and illness still uncalculated given the monstrous consequences of lead poisoning, when this record also is internally standard operating procedure for the ghettoized industrial and racial communities in America? Affluent versus immiserated, the social-structural-ideological battle continues, America a growing wasteland of class rule, deep currents of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, a political system, Michigan a carbon copy of the nation, in which the cards are so stacked against those deemed of secondary human worth, that we can expect more Flints, just as we've come to expect more Vietnams and Iraqs, the Garrison State under siege, believed to be threatened by sinister forces within and without, hell-bent

on desecrating the pecking order of values—global hegemony, domestic supremacy of wealth and race—which have served for centuries as designating America’s greatness.

No, war crimes are unpunishable when the force lies largely on one side. To see Flint as a case study of genocide, as I recently suggested in CounterPunch, will find little acceptance in the US, even among Flint’s own people, who, still in a state of shock, cannot believe they have been so misused by their own state government, the emergency manager system devised exactly, in the name of fiscal responsibility, to subjugate-humiliate-renew dependence of a social base already punished, and therefor an easy prey, to manufacturing abandonment, crumbling infrastructure, starved educational and social-service needs. The veil, now torn away from Flint, reveals what is in the making throughout the country: government at every level deceiving its own people, to be docile in the face of national wealth concentration, corporate inversion (the flight abroad to realize favorable tax-domiciles), further mergers and acquisitions to solidify capitalism’s power and wealth in defining the political process, the condition of labor rights, and treatment of the environment, and docile as well, at home, where the state, trespassing on local government, abandons all pretense at safeguarding the people’s health, favoring instead vested interests which enrich themselves at the expense of a degraded citizenry.

In light of the foregoing, I have an admittedly weak response—for now, to wit, the setting up of people’s courts throughout the state, to try Governor Snyder in absentia, since recall and impeachment are unlikely, and in these proceedings make clear the criminal and illicit conduct of state and business leaders alike in bringing the community of Flint to its knees. Let the ax fall on both political parties alike (similar to a Truth and Reconciliation proceeding in countries that have escaped from or overthrown dictatorial regimes), exposing the wounds which come from consistent favoritism to business over the needs of the people: Flint the capitalist fate awaiting us all. This may not be Auschwitz, but let the world know that America and Michigan show a real contempt for their own children, destining them for early and agonizing death, where fiscal responsibility is at issue, and, added incentive, driving home discrimination and making of the discriminated object lessons in knowing their place. Today, blacks and the poor, tomorrow ... who knows whom is next? Flint is capable of establishing a chain-reaction. What can be done there, can be done in any community where the needs of capital and of the people conflict.

FEBRUARY 1, 2016

### **Infanticide: A Policy Choice**

*This is my third article on the crisis in Flint Michigan. The first, Flint: Genocide by Design, the second, Domestic War Criminals: A People’s Court. – NP*

Apathy is an American social disease. We kill our own, and then look away. This is the story of Flint, a nightmare of prostituted government (literally) in the service of money via a context of political-structural debasement. I refer not so much to local authority, but state and national, an intricate web of complicity from Gov. Snyder to Pres. Obama, their respective agencies in charge of safeguarding the public health and environmental well-being of state and nation alike, in which the opposite has taken place, children the primary victim of a society indifferent to anything but capital, its ascendant role, its established wealth and power. It is too simple to say that capitalism is murdering the children of the poor, not because that is incorrect, but because several direct,



intermediate steps have to be factored into the indictment, not least, the aforementioned apathy, specifically induced and/or engendered to cover over the inbred nihilism of the System.

This is too important for one to get bogged down in conspiracy theory. The interpretation now favored is a contamination crisis because of the stupidity of decision-makers at every level of government; I submit, otherwise—rather than stupidity, insert ideology, a consistent direction of public policy which neither credits the suffering of blacks (Snyder, no surprise here, issued a statement that race is not involved in the whole water-supply debacle) and the poor in general, nor accepts responsibility—moral, political, economic—for the degradation of a community that, particularly, is made up of blacks, the poor, and at its historical roots working class. The state, in effect, washes its hands of Flint, not quite the eradication of its identity and people, so much as a studied neglect and indifference which, predictably from the developments in the case, i.e., the toxic character of the river from which the water supply is taken, would result in collective punishment for the city and its residents just for representing who and what Flint is, a presumed embarrassment to state and nation, on grounds of class, race, and the inability to hold onto its manufacturing base (an oblique jab at the UAW and, for the memories of a heyday of militant labor, the suspicion of anticapitalism, whether or not justified). Flint's deterioration, and now, endangerment of the health of the community, actually, because of the long-term consequences of lead poisoning, already at the point of no return, one can see this as a case study in ideological pay-back time, a fate some mining and agricultural communities have faced absent the specific form of poisoning in Flint (mining has its own cross to bear) or possibly the threat to capitalism, easily magnified by ownership across the spectrum of production and investment when things do not go completely its way.

Therefore, Flint becomes an object lesson, viscerally, rather than conspiratorially, determined. The people and surroundings are dispensable, testimony to a two-nations' social mentality from the inception of the republic, and only intensified through industrialization, large-scale immigration, and the boldness in claiming political-market world dominance. Not merely race, which provided a learning tool for upper groups in how to establish Order once for all ensuring hierarchical patterns in defining societal place, but informal separation of the classes vital to the disciplining of a labor force. The initial Nazi business-fronts perfected the idea of soldiers-in-industry, a built-in contempt for, and desire to regiment the lives and aspirations of, working people, finds its counterpart in the reservoir of superiority necessary to maintain social control by capitalist elites. To think that the attitude I am describing is not integral to capitalism, and does not come into play with respect to national and state government authorities' treatment of Flint, foolishly takes American democracy at face value and ignores the bloody history of labor violence. Flint may well be "the final solution" to working class discontent, at any rate, given the lack of militant protest while its children face unspeakable deformities, it would seem mortally wounded verging on paralysis.

If Capital wins hands down in Flint, as now seems the case, the future does not look bright for organized labor, except within what I am terming the definition of place—a system of social-structural CLASS stratification (far more germane to modern times than race) facilitating the concentration of wealth and power from the top down. Snyder, state environmental officials, those filling the emergency-manager cadre, don't give a snap for those who have borne the brunt of their policies, their condescension, indeed, beyond patronizing, their contempt for the so-called lower orders, those who have not made it as have they, and the wealthy bankers, industrialists, developers, standing behind them. Why expect differently? Flint to them is 100,000 nobodies, with no claims on

government. Instead of, let them eat cake, let them use water filters, which it turns out cannot be effective when contamination exceeds (as is now happening) a certain level. Human life is cheap, provided of course protest can be effectively neutralized. Flint is in a bind, so far as the poor are concerned, emphatically not of its own making, but of those traditionally arrayed against them and, unlike Henry James's Princess Casamassima, unwilling to share their hardship, suffering, and fear of worse hanging over them.

Here is my abbreviated version of the timeline of the Flint water crisis provided by the New York Times, with occasional interpolations. The Times begins: "Months after warning signs emerged about problems with the water in Flint, Mich., city, state and federal officials are responding to the public health emergency. High levels of lead had leached from pipes into the water supply." It continued, April 25, 2014, its first entry: "The city switches its water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River. The switch was made as a cost-saving measure for the struggling majority-black city. Soon after, residents begin to complain about the water's color, taste and odor, and to report rashes and concerns about bacteria." Succinct, to the point, because the original supply, from Lake Huron, was pure, while the Flint River has been known as a toxic dump. What could be clearer, that not stupidity, but ideology, comes into play; and that a "cost-saving measure," defining the purpose of the emergency-manager system, in which appointment is made by the governor, superseding all local authority, also represents, as it does with the IMF with respect to European economies, the negation of democratic procedures and power-relations, for the sake of fiscal responsibility? Fiscal responsibility (aka, austerity) trumps human life—and those advocating for it, know full well the consequences. More on this by all odds fateful and pivotal decision to resort to a contaminated source for an American city's water supply later: contamination, lead poisoning, is not a species of scientific exotica. If you are running the Department of Environmental Quality (Michigan) or the Environmental Protection Agency (US), or up the ladder, the governor or president responsible for the official's appointment, the facts of lead poisoning are an open book, and everyone along the line of authority should, under any meaningful conception of the rule of law, be held accountable and regarded as the felons they are.

The Flint city government, hardly blameless, issued a news release: "Flint water is safe to drink." Then August-September 2014, The Times reports: "City officials issue boil-water advisories after coliform bacteria are detected in tap water." Band-aids would have been as good. October, Stephen Busch, a district supervisor for the state DEQ issued a statement: "The city has taken operational steps to limit the potential for a boil-water advisory to re-occur." Meanwhile, children and fetuses of the unborn are subject to poisoning, and, still October, we learn that car parts are just as vulnerable as fetuses and children: "A General Motors plant in Flint stops using municipal water, saying it corrodes car parts." One would think, enough is enough: blow the whistle on this travesty of justice. Yet, January 2015, when the situation could have been materially improved, in fact, corrected (after, however the harm had already been done—lead poisoning plays for keeps). We read: "Detroit's water system offers to reconnect to Flint, waiving a \$4 million dollar connection fee. Three weeks later, Flint's state-appointed emergency manager, Jerry Ambrose, declines the offer." No excuse here, even austerity scruples overruled, suggesting the policy toward Flint was deliberate, not inadvertent, and beyond Ambrose stands Snyder, knee-deep in denial and, subsequently, sanctimonious apology before the state legislature (fully seventeen months after the story was known).

Among the memos released by Snyder, one, February 2015, already disputes the harm being done, the presumed frivolous nature of the complaints: “It’s clear the nature of the threat was communicated poorly. It’s also clear that folks in Flint are concerned about other aspects of their water—taste, smell and color being among the top complaints.” As if the complaints did not tell us something. Feb. 18, a revealing entry puts the degree of contamination into perspective, Flint being way over the line of danger to humans: “104 parts per billion of lead are detected in drinking water at the home of Lee Anne Walters.... [She notifies the EPA.] Even small amounts of lead can cause lasting health and developmental problems in children. The E.P.A. does not require action until levels reach 15 parts per billion [hers, 104 parts per billion], but public health scientists say there is no safe level for lead in water.” Feb. 26: “A water expert from the E.P.A. and the [DEQ] discuss high levels of lead found in a resident’s water sample.” By this point, criminality suffuses the official air, no response from Obama, EPA, Snyder, DEQ, in the worst tradition of stonewalling. There is no excuse for not taking action, particularly when, the next day, Miguel del Toral, an EPA expert, and one of several heroes of the story who tried to alert authorities to the harm being done, warned that Michigan, in the way it was testing the water, had understated lead levels in the water: “Given the very high lead levels found at one home and the preflushing happening in Flint, I’m worried that the whole town may have much higher lead levels than the compliance results indicated.”

Not the poisons, but Flint was being flushed down the toilet. March 3, 2015: “Second testing detects 397 parts per billion of lead in drinking water at Ms. Walter’s home.” Still no response: on March 12, we learn that “Veolia, a consultant group hired by Flint, reports that the city’s water meets state and federal standards; it does not report specifically on lead levels.” And jumping ahead to May 6, 2015: “Tests reveal high lead levels in two more homes in Flint.” On July 2 we see in microcosm agency complicity with the governing power structure, national and state (for what else could it be?): “An E.P.A. administrator tells Flint’s mayor that ‘it would be premature to draw any conclusions’ based on a leaked internal E.P.A. memo regarding lead.” This is more and more like Ibsen’s “Enemy of the People” and the poisoning of the public baths, except that Flint is paying a higher price for the cover-up. In mid-August, DEQ “tells Flint to optimize corrosion control,” that is, don’t switch to a safe source of water, just apply chemicals to the pipes to prevent leaching (supposedly extracting the poisons which, it turns out, are not confined to lead but result as well from the chemical process itself).

Now we’re coming closer to the present, each passing day an indictment of Obama, Snyder, the regulatory apparatus, either doing nothing or, in the state, deceiving the public and, worse, the residents of Flint. September 2, another one of our very few heroes: “Marc Edwards, an expert on municipal water quality and professor at Virginia Tech, reports that corrosiveness of water is causing lead to leach into the supply.” Quickly, DEQ “disputes those conclusions.” The state goes on the offensive mounting the barricades of denial. We are now at Sept. 24-25. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, chief of pediatric medicine at Hurley Medical Center in Flint and assistant clinical professor at Michigan State (I accord her top laurels for showing courage and speaking out), led a group of doctors who “urges the city to stop using the Flint River for water after finding high levels of lead in the blood of children.” The Times couldn’t be more blunt: “State regulators insist the water is safe.” In fact the regulators, DEQ along with the Department of Community Health, said that inquiry into children’s blood levels of lead was becoming a “political football,” as the blame-game was on, so that responsibility could be shifted to the state itself. Then, Sept. 28, suspiciously

late, Snyder claims notification of the Flint problem: “The governor is briefed on lead problems in a phone call with the state environment department and federal officials.” Note, however, his State of the State address, where he claims to apologize and state he is fully on top of the situation, is still more than three months away.

I wish I could report substantive accomplishment, but as of January 30, promises are cheap and have not been translated into action. Oct. 1: “Flint city officials urge residents to stop drinking water after government epidemiologists validate Dr. Hanna-Attisha’s finding of high lead levels.” Snyder “orders the distribution of filters, the testing of water in the schools, and the expansion of water and blood testing.” There is only one school nurse for all of Flint, and the prescribed testing is handicapped by a pitiful allocation of funds. Dec. 14: “Flint declares an emergency.” On Dec. 29, the director of DEQ resigns, and an advisory task force puts all the blame on the agency, exempting all other parties from responsibility. Jan. 16, Obama antes up \$5 million taken from FEMA, and on the 20th the Michigan House approves the sum of \$28 million for relief (replacing pipes alone has been estimated to cost \$1.5 billion). There Flint lies, the pin cushion of class hatred and/or disdain for its people, their health, their livelihoods.

When I was growing up, in the years following World War II, there was a popular saying, one originally expressed by G.I.s in Korea: “That’s the way the ball bounces.” Fatalism, inevitability, absorbing or riding with the punch, expecting nothing more or less. By the time of Vietnam, call the mood amoral cynicism, the infliction of harm without batting an eye, burning villages, napalming civilian populations, a mindset easily corralled by business for its aggrandizement, no holds barred in the drive for capital accumulation, no matter whose ox is gored. Capitalism in full splendor, not subject—similarly, the military—to restraint of any kind, so that a president in our own time can negotiate a vast trade partnership with one hand and direct a program of drone assassination with the other, the two intimately connected by a divine license accorded America inhering in its self-deluded doctrine of Exceptionalism.

Exceptionalism not only tolerates but creates the Flint of today, antecedently, the conditions of poverty, underfinanced social services (yes, one school nurse for a large educational system), even the lack of a large food market for the entire area. If Flint were on the coast, and the Atlantic were the Aegean, we by rights should see a mass migration to European countries, the Syrians facing the military equivalent of Flint residents’ economic deprivations, the common thread here, death hovering overhead as the larger community sits back and treats the suffering casually if at all. Michigan and Washington are dialectically intertwined, each encouraging the other to adopt the manifesto (used in both senses), business as usual. This is not a partisan issue; despite an inhumane governor and legislature, both Republican, in the state, Democrats are hardly any better, coming very late to the table and with both hands tied behind their back. Ditto, the nation, except that Obama is technically a Democrat, there being inhumaneness enough to spread around, so that party differences hardly matter, particularly when the policies of both have helped to make Flint what it is today. A military budget second to none has a way of draining all compassion from society, as well as limiting the ameliorative prospects of government.

As seen above, when it comes to regulation, government is not only perfidious, it is evil, the Swiss Guard of corporatism, monopolism, and war, all in contradistinction to a defense of the people’s interest. Regulation caricatures itself, EPA, DEQ, parties to business self-regulation in which government promotes the concentration and consolidation of capitalism as foundation for a

strong and powerful State, self-regulation itself the product of a co-partnership between the private and public realms. Indirectly, this speaks to the precarious condition of Flint, for the idea of public responsibility for society's welfare goes against the ideological grain of advanced capitalism, a concession of principle which opens the way to the democratic leveling of classes. Whether state (Snyder) or nation (Obama), explanations relying on conspiracy theory are crass; instead, capitalism epistemologically shapes a holistic framework of thought, difficult to break apart into sections admitting mutuality, cooperation, non-invidious social relations, along with, on the other hand, treating the individual as a commodity and viewing human life as a means to one's own exploitative ends. Rather, the capitalist mindset cherishes stability, seeks totality of ideological perspective, thus rejects as more than window dressing the harmonious dimensions of human affairs.

Let's briefly look closer at Flint vis-à-vis the forces confronting it. It has to lose, or America will never be the same again; race and class are irrelevant when stripped of motive power to effect a democratization of status and values, but when, as here, the potential—if nothing more—exists to question capitalism and the State, exposing both to do fundamental harm to the body politic, poisoning the wells of citizenship and social identity, then the time has come for upper political-economic groups to fight back in defense of their privilege. Flint is a test case for the determination of power relations in society, the legitimacy of property with its full complement of institutional-cultural support, or the public health of working people, their consciousness for acting as a class, and the shucking-off of deferential behavior. Regrettably, Flint has not thus far accepted the challenge, making for a one-sided contest of wills going to its abject defeat. Yet there has to be more. The sit-down strikes are inscribed in the city's DNA, and the dire circumstances of public policy converging on the destruction of children's health, appears to be waking up community spirit to slough off the apathy and discouragement I alluded to, thereby making government all the more resistant to social change, all the more willing, despite public-relations stunts about admitting responsibility (Snyder's State of the State address), to tough it out against what is seen, by ideological choice, as the class-enemy, blacks, the poor, or a combination thereof.

Go back to September, 2015, as reported by Goodnough-Davey-Smith's NYT article, "When the Water Turned Brown," (Jan. 23, 2016), to Dr. Hanna-Attisha's announcement of her evidence-based charge (this late in the narrative, where filters, etc., are in play), that "the number of Flint children with elevated levels of lead in their blood had risen alarmingly since the city changed its water supply the previous year," and one finds, what?—stonewalling by the authorities, denial, even attack on her character. Within hours of her news conference, they write, the Department of Health and Human Services declares the findings false, DEQ calls her remarks, "unfortunate," the concern over Flint's water, "near-hysteria," and argues DEQ has met for months "state and federal standards." That may be true, but what does that say about the standards? Goodnough, et. al, capture the human drama of those who buck the system: "Dr. Hanna-Attisha said she went home that night feeling shaky and sick, her heart racing. 'When a state with a team of 50 epidemiologists tells you you're wrong,' she said, 'how can you not second-guess yourself?'" When I title this paper, "Infanticide: A Policy Choice," do I, despite its harshness, exaggerate? Only this month does the governor, in mock-contriteness, admit the validity of Dr. Hanna-Attisha's findings.

By way of further detail and recapitulation, one sees deliberateness in the pattern, not the willful poisoning of Flint's children and the community as a whole, but the indifference to their fate when the procedures and protocols followed were certain to yield a horrifying outcome, an indifference

grounded in the last analysis in an hierarchically-structured capitalist system which views with contempt the underlings generated by it, blacks and the poor reduced to ciphers of no-account, Flint therefore a living laboratory of class attitudes and policies full-pedal ahead in ignoring harm done its already-marginalized who are dimly viewed as impediments to Empire and Greatness. The reporters add, in light of last-minute admissions by the governor and state officials, “Yet interviews, documents and emails show that as every major decision was made over more than a year, officials at all levels of government acted in ways that contributed to the public health emergency and allowed it to persist for months. The government continued on its harmful course even after lead levels were found to be rising, and after pointed, detailed warnings came from a federal water expert, a Virginia Tech researcher and others.” Ideologues have blocked ears, whether Snyder or the emergency manager who approved the switch in the water supply. And they continue: “And through it all, officials persisted in playing down and dismissing the concerns of Flint residents—one referred to concerned residents groups as ‘anti-everything’—and authoritatively vouching for the water’s purity, even as they themselves were debating whether it was pure.” Amoral cynicism, anyone?

There is no need to drag out the story. Beyond lead contamination (then Flint mayor, in June 2014, Dayne Walling, told the Flint Journal, about the water, “‘It’s a quality, safe product,’”), there were other problems, which may have distracted from the discussion of the lead (misery comes in bundles): “At points, the city’s water tested positive for E. coli bacteria.... City officials pumped extra chlorine into the system to address the bacteria issue, which led to elevated levels of total trihalomethanes, or TTHMs, chemical compounds that may cause health problems after long-term exposure.” February 2015, a state briefing: “the TTHM was ‘not nothing’ but also not an imminent ‘threat to public health.’” July 2015, “Flint sent residents a letter saying it was ‘pleased to report’ the ‘water is safe.’” Can one blame Flint residents for being disheartened and believing that officials all along the line had betrayed them? That can be a dangerous mix, going either way—demoralization or rebellion, at this point still too early to tell. In the words of one mom, whose children already developed sores and lesions, and who was particularly worried about the long-term effects of lead on her learning-disabled eleven-year-old, stated: “‘My trust in everybody is completely gone, out the door. We’ve been lied to so much, and these aren’t little white lies. These lies are affecting our kids for the rest of their lives, and it breaks my heart.’”

With cynicism and indifference also comes hypocrisy. Liam Stack reports in The Times article, “Michigan Gave State Employees Purified Water as It Denied Crisis, Emails Show,” (Jan. 29), that while Snyder’s administration throughout most of 2015 claimed that Flint’s “tap water was safe to drink,” emails released on the 28th “suggest the state was concerned about its own employees’ exposure to the city’s water as early as January of last year, even arranging for purified water to be provided at a state office building there.” Bureaucrats first, citizens last. Stack writes: “The emails depict an exchange that month [January 2015] between employees of two state departments [DEQ and Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget—they knew already!] that expresses concern about the water’s safety within the Michigan government long before Mr. Snyder acknowledged to residents in the fall that there was a problem.” Lonnie Scott of Progress Michigan charged favoritism involved here: “‘While residents were being told to relax and not worry about the water, the Snyder administration was taking steps to limit exposure to its own building.’” As early as January 9, 2015 we see the flow of emails, a facility notification to DEQ about the State Office Building in Flint (which sits, ironically, on the banks of the much-polluted Flint River), the

dispatch of water coolers to each floor—the “email thread” also indicating concern about “unsafe levels” of TTHM in the water. Snyder, two days ago, on Detroit radio, said “he was unaware state employees in Flint had been given purified water starting in January 2015.” Stack, you can sense the futility and game-playing, writes: “Mr. Snyder has said he is committed to fixing the problem [how do you fix the poisoning already occurring in little children?] but he has so far not said when it would be safe for Flint residents to drink tap water without using a filter. He has also declined to say when thousands of water service lines in the city that are made of lead would be replaced, a key step toward convincing the public that it is safe to drink from the tap.”

Finally, let’s not be squeamish, let’s take the plunge into the tainted water supply. Things may be far worse than I’ve made out. Abby Goodnough’s NYT article, “Flint Weighs Scope of Harm to Children Caused by Lead in Water,” (Jan. 29), describes Dr. Hanna-Attisha’s investigations, examination of children and interviews with parents (her current estimate of children exposed to lead poisoning “could number 8,000”). Goodnough soberly observes: “Of all the concerns raised by the contamination of Flint’s water supply, and the failure of the state and federal governments to promptly address the crisis after it began nearly two years ago, none are more chilling than the possibility that children in this tattered city may have suffered irreversible damage to their developing brains and nervous systems from exposure to lead.” This is further reinforced by the fact “that recent tests of unfiltered water in Flint had found levels of lead in some samples higher than what filters distributed to residents were designed to remove.” Some US Public Health Service samples revealed “levels [of lead] higher than 150 parts per billion,” when EPA guidelines declare that “lead in drinking water should be below 15 parts per billion,” and Flint filters supposedly “remove lead up to 150 parts per billion.” Lead, I’m sorry to say, is UNSAFE at any level, and even the assistant secretary of the US Public Health Service, Nicole Lurie, in charge of preparedness and response, sought to downplay the significance of the findings.

The cards are stacked against Flint (and communities, including sections of larger metropolitan areas, like it): “Residents and advocates have expressed outrage over the government’s failure to protect Flint’s children, something many of them say would not have happened if the city were largely white. Adding to their injury, they say, are the harsh conditions of poverty that have already placed obstacles in their young lives.” Too, the future, “when the effects of consuming lead-laced water for months may be all too evident.” Dr. Hanna-Attisha, with her Hurley Children’s colleagues, is “scramble[ing] to put in place the resources so that every child who needs extra help learning or overcoming medical problems will have support for years to come.” Sadly, I fear, the future is here, and it is too late. Consider the reporter’s words: “Decades of research have found that exposure to even low levels of lead can profoundly affect children’s growth, behavior and intelligence over time. Studies have linked elevated lead levels in blood to learning disabilities, problems with attention and fine motor coordination, and even violent behavior.” Goodnough adds, “Younger children and fetuses are especially vulnerable because of their developing brains and nervous systems, which is why the efforts here will focus on children 5 and younger.” Dr. Hanna-Attisha may be like a modern-day Sisyphus, but hardly for want of trying—she is everywhere, yet encountering a mindset, as that of the state nurse who, revealed in one of the emails to the governor’s office, told a Flint resident this month, “regarding her son’s elevated blood lead level, ‘It is just a few IQ points.... It is not the end of the world.’”

No big deal. Dr. Hanna-Attisha dissents; she and others “who have studied lead poisoning have a sharply different view of lead exposure, for which there is no cure.” Her own words deserve to be plastered across Snyder’s Ann Arbor condo: “If you were going to put something in a population to keep them down for generations to come, it would be lead.” (Incidentally, a demonstration in front of his condo has been called for Feb. 3.) Not only the obstructive mindset (increasing degrees of false consciousness as one descends the wealth-ladder, those, like the state nurse, identifying with those above), but material conditions facing the residents of Flint, indicate the enormity of the problem—and perhaps the sadistic impulse driving it home: “Underlying the problem [the poisoning of generations to come] are the troubling conditions prevalent among low-income children and their families in cities like Flint: spotty access to doctors and health care services; a dearth of healthy foods; living conditions so poor that many of the children may have already been exposed to lead poisoning from the paint in their homes; parents with limited time and financial resources.” So, doctors’ focus would be on improving children’s diets, Head Start preschool programs (Flint’s already has a waiting list), and Dr. Hanna-Attisha’s Pediatric Public Health Initiative, bringing together psychologists, child development experts, and nutritionists. But to what avail, given the permanent damage done to children? She states at one point, “Our kids are already rattled by every kind of toxic stress you can think of. Every single day in our clinic we have a 40 percent no-show rate, and it’s not because parents don’t love their children.” She and others urge “families to feed their children foods rich in calcium, iron and vitamin C, which can help minimize the amount of lead their bodies absorb.” Back to the Sisyphus syndrome, the damage is done, continually eating away at the child’s vitals. More: “Yet that raises another problem [as noted before]: Flint is a food desert, with no large grocery stores within the city limits.” One of the mother’s she interviewed lamented: “Instead of them donating all this water, what can they do about the pipes? What can they do?”

What can America do?

JUNE 24, 2016

### **Fissures in World Capitalism: the British Vote**

The collapse of world markets is telling evidence of capitalism’s stake in maintaining a renewed Cold War, indispensable to its logic of global confrontation as a sustaining developmental force and dependence on a disproportionate, heavy-laden defense sector for America and drawing in its allies. The European Union, historically, was first and foremost the economic underpinning to solidify NATO, itself from first to last an obviously military alliance. Together, EU and NATO represented America’s stalking horse in its posture of world intervention and counterrevolution. Obama’s “pivot” to the Far East, his Pacific-first geostrategic framework, complements and extends the US geopolitical vision of global, unilateral dominance—military, ideological, economic.

With Britain’s vote, we see a magnificent—even if Britons voted on other grounds—objective determination to put a roadblock into the American Grand Design of universalizing its own brand of monopoly capitalism (and heading off a projected nuclear holocaust), in which systemic financialization erodes and supplants the US manufacturing base via outsourcing, foreign investment, and securing predictable sources of raw materials, including of course oil.



Consternation and worse reigns supreme in both the capitalist and defense communities, the architectural splendor of simultaneous containment, even isolation, of Russia and China, now on hold, yet hardly surrendered, as America, for its own self-identity, reified the idea of the Pervasive Enemy to accompany its doctrine of Permanent War. Blowback, after all, has some validity, as America's warmongers pressed too far: Obama's modernization of the nuclear arsenal, provocative incursion in the South China Sea, pressures on NATO to occupy the borderlands of Russia. Whether or not inadvertent, Britons have thwarted the US move toward the greater fascistization of a once-democratic polity, yet no longer recognizable as such.

How will America react to the British vote? Probably by intensifying, as is already happening, its Cold War rhetoric, and translating that into more aggressive policies of containment vis-a-vis a growing list of enemies presumed waiting in the wings. Counterterrorism, which has become a catch-all for creating a mindset for ideological conformity, will be a useful instrument for confusing radicalism and terrorism, in order to suppress the former as in Latin America and Africa. Secretly, I suspect, American policy makers hoped for the Britain-EU outcome, so as to beef up European defenses, continue the rearming (encouragement of a nuclear capability) of Abe's Japan, and feel relief in pursuing the abominable policy of armed drone targeted assassination.

My Comment in The New York Times on Erlanger's article, "Britain Votes to Leave E.U.," follows:

Delighted! There has been such evasiveness about the meaning of the campaign. British exit from the EU is a vote AGAINST the renewed Cold War. The elephant in the room is NATO. Obviously, the EU is its economic counterpart, and was never conceived in isolation as a mere trading bloc.

With Britain out, hopefully others will follow, the EU will tighten its ship as an economic union and NATO, now presently at Russia's borders, will be forced to rethink its dangerous course.

Britain did the right thing, even if only intuitively; for only in the defense establishment of the West was the true nature of the vote, and its implications, discussed. Yes, if NATO unravels, along with an EU unravelling, the world will be a step closer to peace and the avoidance of a nuclear holocaust.

I'm ashamed that Corbyn didn't see this, or worse, did, but has been less than frank. Now, Britain, for the first time since the end of World War II, can break its dependence on the US and perhaps, just perhaps, lead the world on a middle course away from bipolarization.

I am thrilled by the results—the ticking clock toward WAR has been slowed down, until perhaps good sense can prevail.

JUNE 30, 2016

### **Economic Nationalism vs. Globalization: Janus-Faced Monopoly Capital**

This week the conflict surfaced of the presumed difference between Trump's economic nationalism and Clinton's globalization, the former thought in the liberal media a betrayal of

enlightened internationalism (similar to the condemnation of Britain's exit from the EU) and, on the side of constructive economic statesmanship, a world order of free trade and peaceful harmony. The Great Obfuscation: Both are mere alternative strategies to ensuring US unilateral global hegemony, to be realized through military power and a geopolitical framework of counterrevolution. Trump and Clinton feed from the same Wall Street trough. Both are imperialist, their differences cosmetic, confrontational with respect to Russia and China, unquestioning about America's right to dictate the conditions, acceptance, and demand for systemic legitimacy of world capitalism (under, of course, US leadership).

Foreign policy is the elephant in the room, more decisive than domestic policy, though crowded off the stage (both Sanders and Warren conspicuous by their silence) in defining America's progression down the road to fascism. Trump and Clinton both have willing accomplices to that end in a white working class that, unlike fifty-sixty years ago possessed the democratic vitality for preserving and pushing further a radical agenda of social welfare, and now a kept class ideologically beaten down so far as to throw in its lot with the forces of reaction and, in trickle-down fashion, upper capitalism itself.

Whether Trump rejects Nafta and TPP or Clinton accepts them, discounting for rhetorical flourishes, each wants an hierarchical social order favoring economic consolidation, the interpenetration of government and business to ensure the farcical nature of the regulatory process, and environmental degradation through lax standards and winking at corporate abuse. In sum, both, in close embrace, have a seat on Obama's lap—the National Security State as a shill for corporatism in America.

Meanwhile, the Left has been noticeably quiet, or perhaps no longer exists as the fighter for peace and social justice, tied up in knots by the flight to the culture wars as a substitute for engaging in the struggle to democratize foreign and domestic policy. America has become the bastion of Reaction, quibbling, as in this election, over how best to maintain dominance abroad, a class system in denial of its basic inequality at home. Why not fascism? For many in society the name is off-putting, but the spirit of authoritarianism is not, nor the viciousness in defending capitalism against all comers. The nation is further away from democracy than ever before. Anti-immigrant feeling is an excellent indicator; callousness to human suffering, the detachment that sees only Americans as capable of bleeding, that universal humanity is some sort of Left-propaganda, that no child should experience privation, a subversive principle, shame on what we've become.

It would be less hypocritical if there were a Trump-Clinton ticket (either one on top) devoted to military supremacy and capitalist peak-intensity, than what we have at present. And those of us fooled by Sanders and Warren, nibbling at the edges of the Left while leaving the essential conditions intact for a corporate-financial-military unified ruling group to guide US policy, have still not reacted to the obvious betrayal. The two parties have proven their underlying similarity, white workers split between them, forming a bridge to the homogenization of American politics steps closer to, beyond what once was termed plutocracy, a feel-good cauldron of hate waving the banner of *exceptionalism*.

JULY 11, 2016

## **Massacre in Dallas: America, the Ungovernable**

Blowback doesn't just happen with America's global intervention; it happens here as well—and based on the same political-structural-ideological dynamics. Anticommunism, the rigid fixation defining the American world-view for over a century, creates an authoritarian atmosphere in which racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism thrive, already overlaid on the foundations of a mature capitalism dependent for its functioning on militarism and class division (a grossly uneven distribution of wealth and power). This does not excuse the murder of police officers in Dallas. It helps to explain the context for its occurrence.

Violence gnaws at the national soul, a unified fabric of psychodynamics created at the outset by US counterrevolutionary engagements and practices throughout the world. Capitalism joined to militarism as mutually reinforcing agencies of hegemonic stabilization, seen in peak intensity in the American experience, profoundly affects, justifies, legitimates what goes on internally in society. What happened in scorched-earth policies in Vietnam, torture and murder at My Lai, waterboarding and rendition today, cannot but further depersonalize and, as with armed drone assassination, desensitize the political culture—to the extent that even the oppressed take on the features of the oppressor.

No, the assassin in Dallas is not thereby exonerated; beyond murdering officers, he or they defiled a peaceful march by demonstrators themselves protesting police brutality, whether Louisiana and Minnesota or the innumerable cases of daily humiliation in which white police officers have beaten down and sometimes murdered black citizens. This was not an act of revolutionary violence, but a crude imitation of falling into the abyss of white hatred and nihilism. In fact, less an imitation than an internalization of the mindset of the oppressor, the real consequence of a fascistic mode of social control and racism.

America descends into a hellish framework, which corrodes and poisons all within it, even the innocent of wrongdoing, and the victims of abuse, exploitation, arrogance, and pride, due to its infliction on other peoples and its own population as well of a projection of contempt of what is specifically human, life-giving, selfless, no longer to be found in its own identity and aspiration. But the extermination-urge directed outward, lest it return home as self-hatred, cannot go on indefinitely without provoking irremediable damage in every way. We are seeing that now with the renewal of the Cold War and its mirror image, the impulse to kill with impunity those in America who do not measure up to the patriotic standards of whiteness, affluence, conformity.

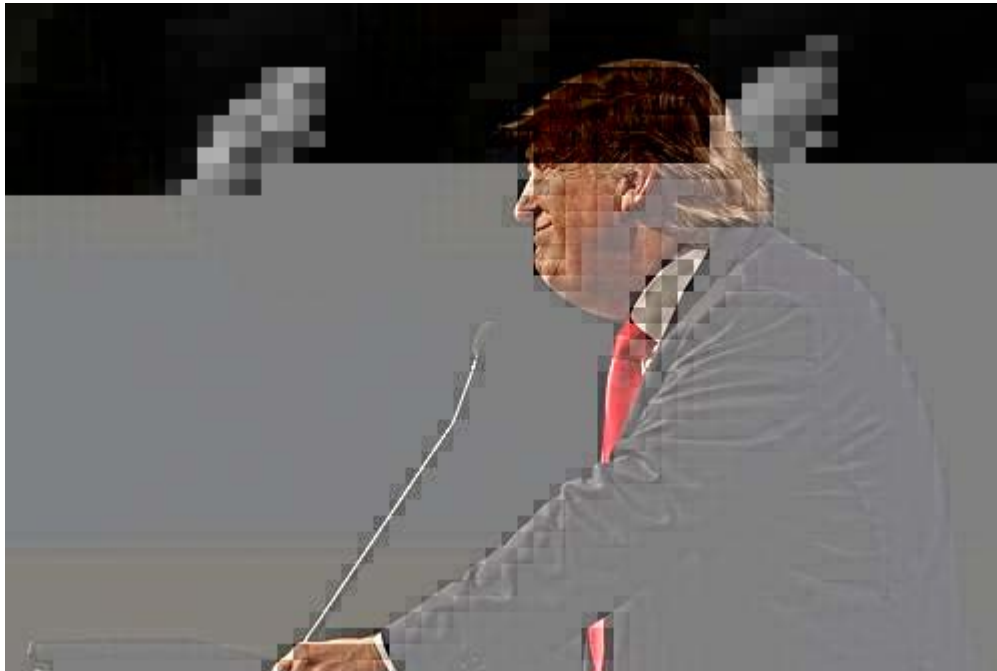
Patriotism is everywhere, pushing to the borders of Russia (US-dictated NATO strategy) and to battle groups in the South China Sea (Obama's Pacific-first geopolitical reorganization of the global system) from an encrusted American fear of losing its unilateral chokehold on the world system. Better dead than red, better collective destruction than a multipolar and decentralized international order based on mutual respect and social justice—an order specifically and directly antithetical to US needs, values, continued prosperity.

A crazed gunman killed five officers in Dallas and wounded others. A crazed bipartisan leadership, coalesced with financial and business elites, and military brass, kill in seconds around the clock the same or greater number. Is it possible that if the latter did not happen, neither would we see more of the former? I have implied that violence is contagious; to go further, it is also

causative, particularly when legitimate authority takes the lead and sanctions rules which filter down to the rest of us. Rules such as, show no quarter; brutality is next to godliness, when the (self-approved and self-defined) cause is just—which it always is.

JULY 15, 2016

### **Authoritarian Politics: Trump, Clinton, and Neo-Fascism**



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Confessore's article, "For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance," in *The Times* (July 13), is a well-researched indictment of white working-class ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and psychopathological anxieties and hatreds about the seeming loss of economic, political, racial status in America. Of course, white dominance remains far-reaching, much of the fear is opportunistic (designed to vent aggression with impunity), and is stimulated and guided in some measure by Trump's carefully planned statements, hints, and innuendoes. The fascistic context of his campaign is half-contrived, half-real, but in both cases testifying to a receptive populace already predisposed to war and reactionary social policy.

Trump would be nowhere, if the country were not supportive of self-debasement and self-pity ready to spring out and be translated into the vilest social ethic of superiority since World War II. How did this come about? Capitalism in America requires nothing less for its identity and performance. The proof of this is that Clinton and her supporters are little better, little to distinguish the two protagonists and the major parties they represent: a muscular world presence by divine right, superimposed on a class-driven society thoroughly intensified by inequality, wealth concentration, a combined ruling group of business-government-military elites integrated through maintaining a common purpose.

Trump and Clinton are each cheek in the Janus-faced Obama, himself the Great Betrayer of what remains of the American democratic spirit, increasingly dormant since the New Deal. Thus, the present impasse affecting America's humane future could have been easily predicted through

tracing the historical course beginning with Truman, with little respite in the internal workings of capitalism and a foreign policy determined on unilateral prerogatives to order the global framework to its liking. Normalcy is repression, turned into gnawing resentment and a call to action—violence ever ready to disgorge its fury. At this point, neither candidate or party offers an alternative to societal decay cloaked in the amassing of unprecedented power to ward off decline from hitherto aggressively-wrought superiority. The world is now multipolar, which the US finds intolerable and the refutation of its exceptionalism.

When we look at Confessore's article, it becomes apparent how far a white working class is descending into a Nazi-like mindset, covering the usual ground of racial and ethnic hostility to what- and whom-ever is deemed the Other. Trump is the Pied Piper leading them over the cliff, while Clinton in desperation attempts a reversal of course hoping her combined capitalism-militarism goes unnoticed, but not so much as, always giving signs of her studied toughness, to lose a hold on the same constituency. Of the two, she may be the more dangerous (with major war an almost certainty) because drenching herself in liberal rhetoric. Sanders's endorsement merely adds to the intended swindle and false consciousness directed to the electorate.

Whites, we read, resent blacks, Latinos, immigrants per se, and the list grows, a resentment toward everyone except those responsible for exploiting them, to which they come hat in hand to do their bidding. Anglin's "The Daily Stormer" spews white nationalism and anti-Semitism, vying with Spencer's own white nationalism congratulating Trump for "bringing identity politics for white people into the public sphere in a way no one has," while Trump sarcastically says he disavows them, and the others coming out of the woodwork to savor their popularity. And Trump retweets many of the hate messages. The danger in all of this is the American receptivity to fascism, but perhaps the equal danger lies in Clinton's liberalization of fascism, spread across a wider terrain, taking in confrontation with Russia and China. Obama has been an excellent instructor for both candidates, with nuclear modernization, massive surveillance, curtailment of civil liberties—so whomever wins in November, the American public will be stepping into the same stream several yards further. There are rough times ahead.

JULY 27, 2016

## **Sanders, Our Tony Blair: A Defamation of Socialism**



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Like Blair, Sanders is a pathetic lapdog, settling cozily into the lap of Clinton, Harridan of War and Militarism, Whoremonger of Wall Street, Ambition-Driven Power-Seeker. It doesn't get any worse, the betrayal of principle that, given his quick, abject submission, makes one doubt his radicalism from the start. Again like Blair he perfected the rhetoric of labor rights, yet driveled off into meaningless protestations of wanting a political revolution (which even Blair realized to be a giant disconnect). And for both, the same status-quo foreign policy of warmed over Cold War and confrontation with Russia and China.

Speaking to the Convention tonight serves to legitimate its prearranged agenda, its shabby ticket, its claims to being a progressive alternative to Republican neo-fascism. I would have preferred seeing him standing outside with his followers who he brazenly deceived, and risk arrest over principle—principle: peace, social justice, single-payer health care, strict and severe curtailment of corporate and banking monopolization and power, environmental rigor, all, inside the Convention, being operationally contemned, neglected, destroyed (with the same phony rhetorical flourish of seeming progressivism).

The two party system never looked this bleak before, Trump, the Mussolini of our time, Clinton, everything rotten and deplorable one can say about a purported Centrism spilling over the line to Far Right reactionary policies maintaining and intensifying a Class-State. There is little to choose between the candidates or their parties—when push comes to shove, a militarized plutocracy, already far along, carried further. On July 23, before I became aware of the WikiLeaks revelations, I wrote the following Comment to the New York Times:

Clinton-Kaine is hardly an alternative to Trump-Pence. Both parties and their candidates resonate on the synthesis of militarism and hegemony, and differ marginally on social-welfare

legislation and programs. America thereby confirms its Rightist orientation to public policy, starting with outsize military budgets and a push to deregulation and privatization.

I pity Wall Street, having to choose between two peas in a pod both eager to serve its interests. Indeed, Clinton is merely Trump in all but party label.

The seeming difference between nationalism (Trump) and internationalism (Clinton) is spurious; both sides are interventionist and confrontational. I suspect the further growth in global tensions, whichever candidate wins.

America has been bereft of leadership for much of the time since FDR, a bipartisan demiurge of mediocrity and belligerence. The future hardly looks favorable to rule of law and human rights; instead, targeted assassination the current symbolization—and who knows what other moral abomination lies down the pike?

Aaron Blake, in the Washington Post (July 24), compiled a list of “the latest, most damaging things in the DNC’s leaked emails.” Parenthetically, the leaks have been blamed by party officials on Russia, using a familiar red-baiting technique to divert attention from the actual content of the emails. If Putin had single-handedly pulled off the caper, this still would not change the obvious sabotaging of the Sanders campaign, a crime of duplicity easily the match of Watergate. And now, Putin and Russia, according to Clinton spokespeople (repeatedly endlessly by television guests in her camp), are favorably inclined to Trump and interfering in US domestic politics. Who needs the Democrats’ use of tried-and-true McCarthyism when Joseph Stalin will do?

Wasserman Schultz, DNC chair, is especially culpable in using the Committee to favor Clinton, despite the expectation that it should take a strictly neutral stand on the candidates. Knowing the favoritism shown—(e.g., bad-mouthing Sanders as an atheist, to be used in religious settings like Kentucky), Clinton, her campaign team, Wasserman Schultz, the DNC, all consistently casting doubt on his person, ideas, viability—Sanders’s firm endorsement of “the presumptive nominee” speaks volumes about his capitulation, to the disappointment of those who believed in him. (That he was booed by his own supporters when he mentioned Clinton this afternoon, was indeed heart-warming.)

Wasserman Schultz complained (late April) to party officials about Sanders’s concern over fair treatment: “Spoken like someone who has never been a member of the Democratic Party and has no understanding of what we do.” If only that were true, rather than the camp follower he has become! And Marc Elias, the Clinton campaign lawyer, sought to discredit him (early May), suggesting “the DNC put out a statement saying that the accusations [of] the Sanders campaign are not true.” He added, “the DNC should push back DIRECTLY at Sanders and say that what he is saying is false and harmful to the Democratic party.” That was the time to fight back, the party’s stacked cards against him already an open secret.

Then we find Mark Paustenbach, DNC national press secretary, charging (late May) that Sanders “never had his act together, that his campaign was a mess.” It’s all Sanders’s fault; the DNC, Clinton, the party, appear as the product of immaculate conception in this telling. Too, Clinton and the party discouraged candidate debates, denying Sanders exposure and the chance to make his case. Everything about the campaign appears ugly, biased, yes, rigged, and yet Sanders endorses

Clinton and is complicit in promoting the party's fortunes. I would regard that decision as, groveling in the dirt.

The most charitable thing I can say is, he lacks the courage of his convictions. And since courage and convictions go together, I'm not certain of the latter. He and Blair both have danced around the May Pole of democratic socialism, each reducing its visions of equality, equity, anti-militarism, and humaneness to a shambles. Meanwhile, the term "Berniebro" is being used within Democratic circles as a scare term whose associations can be readily filled in.

Consider the party, its moral collapse beginning right after World War II, and certainly by the time of Kennedy, in which it subsisted on a diet of anti-communism as the gristle for political advancement. Foreign policy was a travesty, the more seeming "liberal" domestically, the more cutthroat, from Lyndon Johnson to Bill Clinton and beyond, abroad, the result being to vitiate the record in both spheres. So why be surprised today, with Obama and Hillary Clinton—and, to go a step further, so poisonous the roots and heritage of the party in wallowing in anti-communism that it has affected Sanders as well. Try as one might for any sustained, critical analysis of foreign policy on the part of Sanders, and one gets in return the claptrap of a political revolution, to change the subject.

By virtue of his attendance and participation at the Convention, Sanders provides an objective (if unintentional) mea culpa, a formal acknowledgment of personal fault or error. Perhaps, knowing as he and everyone else knew, that the Democratic party was hopelessly corrupt, a willing agency of Cold War, business aggrandizement, surveillance, he should have gone Third Party from the beginning, affirmed proudly the American socialism of Debs, at the least, and/or professed the need for structural reconstruction and social transformation making common cause with socialism on a global basis. He should also have showed unremitting opposition to Obama, and, the most egregious hole in his armor, step forward, formulate and expand on a foreign policy worthy of democratic socialism and international peace. Even his candidacy, as he allowed it to play out, reduces him to a minor role in a totalitarian show trial, now put on exhibition, permitted to have his say, on condition of humbling himself before the capitalist-military deities calling the shots.

As he reached the podium, I wondered, will there ever be a Left again in America, not that Sanders is a worthy standard-bearer, but serving as an object lesson for the here and now, would radicalism take hold, not just at the leadership level, but a true mass base capable of unifying working people into a cohesive class-spearhead for structural and social change? The PEOPLE matter, not the politicians, and surveying the present American scene, the prognosis for the democratization of wealth and power in America looks bleak. (I this afternoon watched Al Sharpton being interviewed on MSNBC, the stale air of Clinton-ism coming through loud and clear.)

We await. In the afternoon, when he was booed by supporters for urging they vote for Clinton and Kaine (himself an abominable choice, the conservative Virginian), Sanders said: "Brothers and sisters, this is the real world that we live in." If that's the case, why then run? There is not a transcendent bone in his body. Now, more of the same, the refurbished lesser-of-two evils argument, addressed to those who believe change is still possible. The let-down of those who worked for him is palpable. Sanders is a puppet, with no one pulling the strings, the debacle his own creation. That he speaks with such urgency indicates one trapped behind the walls of his own self-importance—too banal to be thought treachery.



The air is thickened throughout the day with calls for unity, in this context, a despicable word, code for silence, submission, look-the-other-way, take pride in America as it is, not as it might be—a call to arms, literally, embracing such Democratic policies as armed drones for targeted assassination, pushing NATO by every means possible right up to the borders of Russia, patrolling the waters off China with aircraft-carrier battle groups, and planning and executing paramilitary operations which clear the way for regime change, expanded spheres of influence, market penetration, the whole dirty deal.

Does Sanders protest against all or any of these US activities, activities his designated candidate, Clinton, has favored, and POTUS has carried forward. Unity! By all means, for otherwise lies world communism steamrolling over and pulverizing The Homeland, an act of treason committed by anyone who fails to toe the line. The hour approaches.

Let's listen. Not a word on foreign policy. Praise for Obama, thankful he pulled us out of depression. A veritable orgasm of cheerleading for Clinton, more than any other speaker before the Convention. Unashamed toadying. Worse, outright falsification of positions taken, as in his litany, Hillary Clinton knows, Hillary Clinton understands.

Wall Street brought to its knees by one who received \$700,000 from Goldman for a pair of feel-good speeches? Sanders creates a magical hypothetical of Clinton's positions bearing no relation to reality, whether on health care or banking regulation, or countless other issues ticked off. Yes, we disagreed during the primaries—but “that is what democracy is all about.” And now, we can march into the future together, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. What a con job—and not a peep out of his supporters on the floor. A euphoric experience in deceit and cruelty.

JULY 29, 2016

### **Clinton Incorruptible: An Ideological Contrivance**

Goldman got its money's worth at the Convention, \$700k for two speeches, more a promissory note on behalf of the entire Wall Street community for continued support when and if she is elected president. Clinton, an engine of self-promotion that never turns off, makes Trump's self-promotion infantile, tiresome, and dyspeptic by comparison. A coinciding of personas, public and private, is difficult to hide, ambition-driven translating into hawkish militarism, the mutilation of national healthcare, friend to corporate and financial vested interests, outclassing Trump in service to monopoly capital.

Was the Democratic party hypocritical in nominating Clinton for the presidency? Hardly. Its own record on war, health insurance, corporatism stands out, with the exception of the New Deal, since Kennedy's time with comparable stands going back to Wilson, and before that, Grover Cleveland—a sordid promotion of anticommunism and red-baiting to cover its sins of omission and commission in opposing a society of authentic human welfare. Now, somehow, a woman crashing the glass ceiling—never mind her reactionary bent and danger to world peace—fits perfectly the the scenario of constant obfuscation, as the concentration of wealth-and-power as a unified structural syndrome continues apace.

The desexualization of gender, as proving herself one of the boys (the Afghanistan surge) and continually in evidence wherever paramilitary operations, regime change, and provocative confrontation with Russia and China has been involved in recent years, gives her high credence in Pentagon circles. And her affinity for Clintonian economics, shoulder to shoulder with Bill, and in willing company with Geithner, Summers, and the neoliberal onslaught, adds a dose of steeliness, in the face of widespread poverty and economic class-differences, to her pseudo-masculinity when it comes to displaying reserves of, and readiness to use, power with impunity.

Game-changer, according to Bill? Quite possibly, if her ruthlessness becomes operable, as surely it would, in the advancement of public policy. But that is not what he meant, for as con man (only rivaled by Obama), he credits her with a softness, delicacy, caring-ness, devotion to the cause of children, motherhood, consoling voice to the grieved; he pulls out all the stops in fallacious image-building, a Mother Theresa in pantsuit. Goddess of War and Privilege is more like it, and positively appealing to an America itself increasingly authoritarian, so that in the coming election, it is not that she is a woman but that she shows greater determination and strength in full-scale resumption of the Cold War that proves her winning attraction.

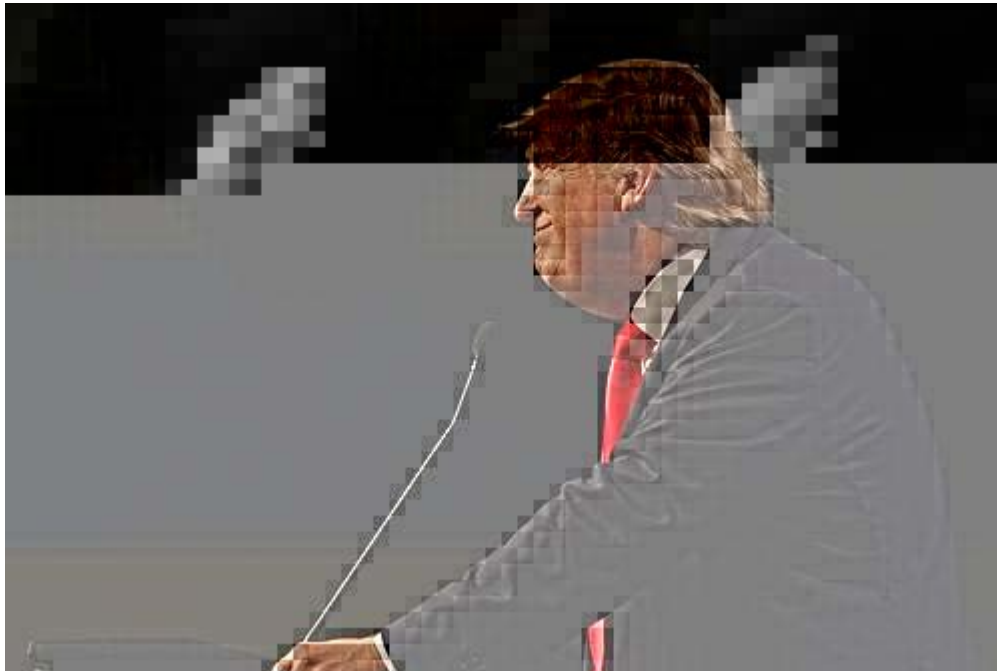
Already the propaganda machinery is cranking out a Trump-Putin hidden relationship, not only to divert attention from her own deviousness (especially the content of the privately-retained emails), but to make her the only safe guardian of American security. Power-woman has little relation to gender-equality and –justice because it reduces identity to a nameless, sexless basis of raw destructiveness. (Children in American—what of the countless children murdered overseas via armed drone targeted assassination, with not a word of protest from her.) She plays the gender card the way Obama played the race card to gain office—utter cynicism, the cultivation of a non-menacing aspect, in both cases making identity politics an utter scam by which to further the worst features of plutocratic-militaristic capitalism in America.

And the masses shout hosannas. A Clinton-Trump election is an uncanny replication of the nation's heartbeat, one that verges on nascent fascism proceeding quickly to a full-scale reproduction. Both Clintons are equally reprehensible to Bush II and Trump in that regard, as measured on that standard, and the major parties they respectively represent, likewise. Who is to blame? Not the candidates alone, and not even the parties as self-sufficient agents of causation. It is us, all of us, either directly engaged in, or directly and indirectly benefiting from, imperialism, militarism, privatization, and a spirit of nihilism (particularly as concerns climate change and the environment), that has thrust candidates and both parties alike into positions of legitimacy and prominence, despite—and actually because of—their contemptuous record on, and regard for, human welfare.

Measured by the stabilization and enlargement of capitalism, in America, but more important, also as an exclusive world system, free from socialism, peoples' democracies, formal and informal colonial dependencies, indigenous peasant revolts, the US stands implicated in its un-budging posture of global counterrevolution. The Philadelphia convention merely drives further nails into the coffin of humanity.

AUGUST 2, 2016

## America and the Trump Conundrum



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Trump is patently semi-fascist. His devouring ethnocentrism (American Greatness) and xenophobia (Anti-Immigrant, Anti-Muslim) confirms a structural-ideological process at work of social Nazification underpinned by his dedication to wealth and amorphous quest for power. In this respect he is the easy target of liberals and progressives, both Democrats as a whole and a moderate segment of Republicans, as well as the “responsible” media like The New York Times.

No argument there. If it were possible to stand alone, abstracting all circumstances and reality, the foregoing would hold, true in and of itself, without qualification. Yet I do not detract from this indictment of Trump, an absolute menace to democratic thought and practice, when I say it is only half the story. The other half is America itself, particularly those who portray him as a monster. They do not have clean hands, Obama and Clinton on down, including most of what we commonly think of as the Left.

Trump is America. I am not a social scientist, i.e., one who, as Barrington Moore pointed out, could carry societal propositions through to the fourth decimal place and certify their validity. I am frankly impressionistic here, but I estimate that between half and two-thirds of all Americans deep down think as Trump does—and the record of American history since World War II tends to confirm that. The leopard cannot change its spots, except at election time, when it behooves one side to appear more enlightened than the other, submerging gut (and thought out) positions to the smug declaration of liberalism and human rights.

Every position he has thus far announced, as so many nails in his political coffin and immediately pounced on for disclosure and condemnation, is actually what the vast majority of Americans believe. It is not simply that Trump is semi-fascist traveling the path to a fulsome actualization, but that America also is: ethnocentric, xenophobic, and worse, blood-thirsty in its pursuit of National Security and the triumphalism of monopoly capital. Anti-immigrant, anti-

Muslim, of course, though not admitted for public consumption. Deference to wealth and the wealthy—so what else is new? Patriotism as code for conformity to racial principles (to which blacks under Obama have submitted, surrendering any potential radicalism that would result in dignity and equality), hierarchical social structuring, and the all-pervasive poisons of militarism—ditto.

In other words, criticism of Trump is misleading and self-serving. No one really cares about his fascistic policy stands, his insults, his broad-based defamations of character, because they are ours as well, the Mighty Fortress of Purity nicknamed, Exceptionalism. What we care about are his references to Putin and Russia. There he goes too far. Every think-tank intellectual and defense “expert” is up-in-arms (literally) at this manifest betrayal of Cold War moral truths about America’s place in the world. If Trump had played it straight, as expected by both parties and the general electorate, Pentagon jargon at the ready, anticommunism in tow, Free World rhetoric freshly minted for the occasion, we would have a very different presidential contest.

Hypocrisy is running rampant (which he may or may not sense). Clinton is just as ideologically and politically rotten as he, rotten—a strong term I use unapologetically (it signifies putridity, moral corruption)—on both domestic and foreign policy. The Putin/Russian invocation is a convenience when we mean something else—a fear of exposure to the whole policy drift that America and its leadership have taken. If anything, Trump and Clinton are a step behind the nation’s fascist tendencies, which is why they have been thrust up to the political roles they now enjoy. Is Clinton any better than Trump on Wall Street, on privatization, on financial concentration, market penetration, corporate taxation, even recipient of business largesse and friendship? From Goldwater Girl to the present, she hasn’t changed an iota, if anything, under Bill’s example and tutelage, more extreme in supporting and benefiting from a militarized, brutal mode of capitalism than could have been foreseen at Wellesley.

But it is her foreign-policy baggage, an undeniable record, that marks her stride-for-stride with Trump, or in fact ahead of him in the high art of intervention, regime change, political murder—for what else is approval of armed drone targeted assassination, but that? Clinton, the Lincoln Great Emancipator of Children, is responsible for the murder of more children as Secretary of State and before and after, as in recommending the Afghan surge, and in her coziness with Flournoy and Panetta (destined for Cabinet posts if she should win) that beckons America to a war-footing posture of permanent war. Trump is grade-school material compared with Clinton in harnessing the War Establishment for purposes of military-ideological confrontation with both Russia and China, a simultaneous unilateral push for uncontested world dominance.

Conclusion: Not that Trump is Debs, Heywood, or Dr. King. He is as close to the incarnation of evil as they come. But so is Clinton. So is practically every liberal and progressive who for too long have kept their rancid antiradicalism beneath the surface as they have countenanced or actively supported domestic repression and foreign aggression. Criticizing Trump and not in equal measure and with equal conviction Clinton is to stand awash in false consciousness, making one complicit in the continued fascistization of America.

AUGUST 10, 2016

**“U.S.A.” Chant: Hegemonic Unity in Global Domination**



Hermann Goring Trump and Ilsa Koch Clinton make a charming couple. They are irascible in their protestations of Americanism, variant styles, and temperaments. Nevertheless, they converge in the commitment to patriotic militarism (aka, plebiscitary fascism cum monopoly capital) as the ideological vehicle to national greatness. Their common bond, beyond an inordinate capacity for undifferentiated resentment and hatred, is their capacity, as a function of major-party politics, to mobilize a like mass response at bottom xenophobic (in international politics, Russia, China) and ethnocentric (the dissident, radicals, peace advocates). For Trump, Muslims play the role that Jews did for Hitler; for Clinton, socialists and pacifists perform the same historical function. Working people including labor unions (hence the plebian dimension to fascism), contrary to history and Marxian wish-fulfillment, have become the shock troops thrusting forward both candidates on the political formula, war-readiness and, so far as class interests are concerned, self-castration.

Fascism has never been in finer fettle in America: who needs a guttural Joe McCarthy when the specimens at hand are ready and willing to lead? The conversation has barely changed. The irreducible anticommunism characterizing, by whatever name (now, terrorism, previously, radicalism, anarchism, socialism), the national discourse of insecurity and aggression, is readily converted into a cesspool of generalized phobias. These are supported at all points by concrete actions of US foreign policy, in which intervention and regime change have kept the rest of the world on tenterhooks.

So here we are, awaiting another presidential election, which, truth be told, merely adumbrates and delineates themes prevalent for seventy years, since the close of World War II. There have been few exceptions in leadership in either party to the Leadership Principle (the fusion of person, social structure, political economy), few policy orientations and platform measures to impede the course of impending fascist closure, few if any breakthroughs to the regimentation of social thought now typified in Obama's promotion of massive surveillance, few courageous, stand-up acts of resistance

on the part of labor to war, concentrated wealth, the privileged status of Vested Interests, from banking to oil, to medicine, to pharmaceuticals—and the list creeps on to near-infinity.

Whither America? Democracy, beginning in the 17th century, has never been one of its strong suits. The Marxian dialectic is distinguished by its absence, a monochromatic progression of ever-expanding sameness. The city on the hill extends to the swamps of moral absolutism and indifference to humanity. Stepping back, one sees Trump-Clinton as the singular expression of contempt for the democratization of society, economy, and culture, a process coterminous with the valuing of authoritarian patterns in world affairs. Trump-Clinton is the voice of one when it comes to the articulation and projection of world power, the voice of increased stridency if that were possible when added to such power is the universality of capitalism as the sole legitimate global system.

Try as one might, daylight cannot be forced between them. Ruling groups are sacrosanct, the best citizenry, to be looked up to as the generators and custodians of the national wealth, with Trump-Clinton sharing duple captaincy. Wall Street and Corporate America in general could not be more delighted with these circumscribed political boundaries. Scratch the candidate, either one, and beneath exists the nether world of military power virtually unlimited in scope and size, anxiously waiting to spring forward. Whether autarky is conceived as nationalism (Trump) or internationalism (Clinton), its message of self-sufficiency as the militarization of exceptionalism is heard loud and clear.

What have America's major political parties become but agents of pacification, canceling out political change while the exercise of power is funneled into an elitist system of Upper Capital in which the military is welcomed with open arms. Trump vies with Clinton in extolling the virtues of strength and National Greatness, which boil down to self-accredited authority to define and regulate international politics to achieve, among other things, global ideological purification. It is as though imperialism, centered on market penetration, has given way to domination for its own sake. And complementing that, we find an arousal of anger to divert attention from the failings of capitalism, thereby disarming criticism and at the same time tightening the screws of a discrepant framework of wealth-and-income distribution.

Come November, Republicans, Democrats, Trump, Clinton, who cares? The political parties have charted the race to the bottom for so long, one more soft landing will hardly be noticed. In prideful affirmation, we term this the normalization of democratic practice. Fewer and fewer Americans, as time goes on, are seeing through the charade. In that light, fascism will meet with little resistance when its time comes, decked out in bunting, even confetti thrown from the rooftops.

AUGUST 25, 2016

### **Troglodyte Vs. Goebblean Fascism: The 2016 Presidential Race**

Simply, we have “reclusive habits or outmoded or reactionary attitudes” (Webster’s) and sophisticated, propagandistic methods initially perfected in modern times by Nazi Germany (Pollack): Trump/Clinton, a race to the rock-bottom of authoritarianism, sans—for now—the concentration camp, but NOT, its foreign policy equivalent, a contest over who is more militaristic and war-like, directed into a confrontational posture in world politics.

Everything is secondary, whether immigration restriction or Wall-Street-favoritism of corporatism, to the ultimate threat to humankind in the visceral belligerence manifested by the two candidates, and the makeover of society to realize their respective visions (not that dissimilar) of unilateral domination of the Global System. Demagogy is not new to American politics; what is increasingly new is its distinctively fascist, as opposed to mere reactionary, cast of mind and projected operations.

Trump is perhaps an iconoclastic expression of what the vast majority of Americans have come to believe, and in that respect is not different from the liberal and conservative variants of the basic theme: a profound antiradicalism embodied in the integrated relationship between government and business (interpenetration of elites into a homogeneous ruling group where the State and Capitalism, with the addition of the Military, are fused into a functioning command system). The system is at once political, economic, and ideological, whose purpose is the tightening and perpetuation of an hierarchical social order composed of invidious class differences.

Fascism should not trip lightly off the tongue, for that trivializes its appearance when it comes. But it is *here*, or nearly so, with its hard side, an ethnocentric/xenophobic ideational core, and its soft side, the structural encroachment of business on every phase of American life, consumerism the mandate for imperialism and global conquest, the State supplying the planning and necessary hardware. This attitudinal-systemic framework is not the monopoly (pardon the pun) of one party, but represents the primordial impulse representing both—as though there were no alternatives, no turning back, a decadent future seemingly though not really deterministic, only made to appear so.

Scratch a liberal and you have antiradicalism. That is what liberalism has been about since at least the time of John Locke, not redistributive social justice but purging anything to the Left (as in the case of the English 17<sup>th</sup> century Levellers onward) which might challenge an ever more codified and rigidified capitalist weltanschauung ratified by today's American ideological value-oriented consensus. What is to be done? Talk of course is cheap, a self-castration awaiting further political-structural regimentation. Regrettably, I have no solution, at least none that will pass the smell test of massive surveillance already currently practiced. Landmarks are falling. The New York Times is virtually aligning itself with the Enemy by consecutively attacking Trump *without* a commensurate exposure of Clinton.

Each day the so-called rival camps outdo each other in nailing the coffin of democracy, itself lying on the ground alongside the pit being dug. That the Republicans nominated Trump in the first place, despite last-minute defections to a position not much better, confirms that party's moral bankruptcy. But how are the Democrats any different? Clinton, following Bill's example, has been so corrupt and self-serving for so long (with the Vested Interests piling up behind to share in the economic-financial-structural lucre), that the normalization of political criminality is no longer noticed. We have become habituated as a nation to an amoral cynicism justifying as the rightful fruition of exceptionalism a solipsistic obsession with power, gain, world mastery.

The latter words might not be found in either party's platform, but there is equal subscription to their values, Republicans starting from an internal Fortress America, the Democrats merely assuming that to offer a more articulated paradigm of global domination. In both cases, an increasing deformation of American society, starting with an assault on the social safety net, is required to initiate and realize a tightly-organized class society in the name of classlessness. The

poor beware, minorities beware, dissenters beware, no authentic respect for human rights, even civility qua mutual politeness, can be expected, and will come to the vanishing point, when the integral purposes of mature capitalism are achieved.

Alienation is built into the societal edifice, a known factor long before Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, which enabled him to write as presciently as he did. The commodity becomes engrained in the human psyche, and from there the merry race commences, codified in the institutions and culture of property, for superiority one over another fellow human being. Is it too late for systemic rectification of what should be regarded as the political culture of oppression and evil? *That* would make for an interesting starting point for discussion and possible action, not the mealy-mouthed platitudes offered by the candidates, their respective parties, and America as a whole.

AUGUST 26, 2016

### **American Exceptionalism: A Pernicious Doctrine**

Ideology is the self-serving goad to and representation of power. It is an integral function of political domination. The political as the more familiar expression of statecraft and class rule, it provides the core of meaning for underlying other expressions of power and domination: economic, cultural, whatever is the means for asserting, developing, and stabilizing hegemonic purposes—preponderance, influence—over others, be they nations, classes, individuals. When exceptionalism is claimed and maintained, that is a sure-fire invocation of an antidemocratic mindset, structural framework, and political economy.

Exceptionalism is not a matter of moral virtue (it never is, or it would not be claimed), but of raw, unmitigated force, real, implied, or waiting in the wings. American exceptionalism is no exception; indeed, it is confirmatory, seldom have other nations advanced such claims. In recent history (we might go back to the Roman Empire and even further, to Sparta in Ancient Greece), the clearest most obvious example is Nazi Germany: the Third Reich of a Thousand Years. Hitlerian ideology depended on the theme of exceptionalism to manifest its superiority, which took in the murder of millions. Exceptionalism, as a claim on humanity, is inherently *evil*; it cannot subsist without accompaniment of militarism, genocide, internal manipulation and social control.

Exceptionalism is an open proclamation of superiority. It is no wonder it forms the inner heart of American ideology, a continuing motif since John Winthrop's "City on a Hill," although then stated in perhaps more innocent theological terms, summoning the 17<sup>th</sup> century vision of Commonwealth and the possibility of a society knit together around the principle of equity. Not so, later; for by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, commonwealth, applied to America, had already lost its meaning, and the American Revolution merely restated the Lockean societal and propertied framework legitimating class and racial dependence on the—you guessed it—superior. From there to the mid- and latter-19<sup>th</sup> century *ideology* of Manifest Destiny was a hop, skip, and a jump, so well had the ground been prepared as corporate and industrial capitalism became ascendant forces.

In sum, exceptionalism, once more given pride of place, from rationales for intervention, to buttressing a flagging national spirit, is a defining trait of American political thought. Its influence is everywhere, as in the self-righteous vaporization of individuals in targeted drone assassination, in



mounting and carrying to completion regime change, in demanding outsized rights to shape and benefit from the world financial system, in establishing the foundation for its own version of the unilateral Capitalist Millennium, and binding together these and related traits and policies, a nonpareil military strength to compel observance/obedience to American wishes, dictates, decisions, even whims.

Exceptionalism poses a grave danger to the world community. But why, in a seemingly abstract piece on US intellectual history, raise this concern *now*, and why focus on exceptionalism? The reason should be clear: both major-party candidates, and behind them, the political parties that they represent, behind them, the nation as a whole, and finally, the very substance of American ideology, have made of exceptionalism the motive force for and reason behind this country's existence—with all of the consequences that follow in its wake. Democracy is, and perhaps always has been, a sham, when superiority is claimed as part of its self-identity. America has issued itself a get-out-of-jail card from near its inception, certifying it can do no wrong. Today, Trump and Clinton speak as one on the maximization of America's global power. They speak as one on the existence of the drastic maldistribution of wealth. They speak as one on gargantuan expenditures for the US war machine. They speak as one on the denial of, and exemption from, war crimes committed in the past and continuing into the present, with no sign of a turnaround in the future. Iraq, Libya, Syria, marching back in time to Vietnam, as the incubator of merely the most recent round of hostile acts.

Exceptionalism, right at this moment, is more germane to the state of America's perpetual motion toward aggrandizement and legitimated violence than perhaps ever, because more out of keeping with the aspirations of humankind. Woodrow Wilson would make the world safe for democracy; Trump, Clinton, Obama, would cram it (more suitably defined to suit the national interest) down the throats, in the name of world order, of the global peoples. Trade, markets, investment, the nuts-and-bolts of imperialism, while still vitally important, take a backseat to the military imperatives of maintaining an overlordship of the international system—a goal consistent with the belief in exceptionalism.

The naked thirst for power, even if for no other reason than the morbid fear of falling behind other nations, may play well in Peoria, but it holds the potential for unimaginable destruction, as though Dulles's rollback theory and planning are again operant, not only vis-à-vis Russia and China, but a multipolar world of awakened energies. America resolutely faces what it considers the encirclement of strangers, aliens, darkened forces, whose sole purpose is to question and ultimately demolish the one incarnation of exceptionalism (because there can only be one) in world politics, the repository of enlightenment shined on by God's grace. No better formula for exploitation has yet been devised, with gradually increasing consequences at home as well as abroad.

SEPTEMBER 5, 2016

### **Hillary Clinton is Shameless**

Never has a candidate for President been so solicitous—and transparent about it—of major wealth, what the New York Times (stepping out of character) admits is her appeal to the Ultrarich. In Chozick and Martin's, "Where Has Hillary Clinton Been? Ask the Ultrarich," Sept. 3, we find the most lopsided appeal to wealth—at the expense of normal campaigning—in US electoral

history: estate after estate, party after party, closed doors, the pampered and selfish, coming out of the woodwork, to bask in the love of one who gravitates to them like moths to a light.

Hillary Clinton has no shame. Forget press conferences. Brazen out FBI findings of duplicity, criminality (though the Agency demurs from the charge), inadvertence in destroying evidence, a bottomless well of rotten practice—and this the darling of liberals and so-called progressives. Weighed in the scales of decency and social justice, how is she better than Donald Trump? Both are fascistically-inclined, both have contempt for working people and minorities, both have chauvinistic militarism in their blood. How can there be a choice of the lesser of two evils when each vies for the pinnacle of Evil-ness?

Whore? For \$125,000, you get dinner and a meet-the-candidate (some as high as a quarter \$M)—and if under 16 years old at the gathering, for \$10,000 you can ask the candidate a question. Auction-block politics, except that it is the American people on the slave-block. In this hothouse atmosphere, the host ensures Clinton will not be embarrassed. Why should she be, they're all bosom buddies, all see eye-to-eye, gatherings of the self-righteous that make a Mafia summit look like a children's tea party.

What is to be done? Trump is hardly an alternative. The plebeian billionaire is capable of anything. Clinton has disqualified and perjured herself as unworthy of any office. She and her husband, the Bonnie & Clyde of Mammon worship (even Trump, hard to believe, seems to have more character). As for the decisive area of foreign policy, there is little to choose: the sophistication of liberal think-take, national-security genocidal adventurism on one hand, gut-authoritarians, simple-minded zealots on the other. Of the two, the former may well be the more dangerous.

Is the Third Party a valid alternative? To many, yes, but here we still do not have a clean break from the Cold War mentality. (And Bernie Sanders wins a medal as outstanding disappointment with his ersatz Revolution funneled into the Clinton camp.) America is a declining Empire, desperately grasping for straws. Anything to stand on top, its strategic focus on counterrevolution, its political focus on structural-ideological hierarchy to keep the poor at bay and in their place. At some point, the malaise of fascist boredom will possibly solve our problems for us, with the mushroom cloud. There is nothing to indicate a spirit of freedom in the works, except possibly on cultural issues which—everything else the same—do not and cannot translate into authentic democratic feeling.

I may overstate the gloom-and-doom scenario, in which case CounterPunchers might find incentive in promoting fruitful ways of radicalizing America. Thinking small will not do it, whether the commune or political capture of a single town. Power has been centralized at the bayonet-point of perfection, easily able to absorb when not crushing societal dissidence. But the very least one can ask of any human being is not to support either major-party candidate. Militarism is in the air—the stench, overpowering. Ditto, plutocracy. The two go together, and any alternative must tackle them both, shrink and ultimately destroy the cancer metastasizing in the American body politic.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2016

## **The American Way: Indefinite Detention**

Recent reports state that President Obama upon leaving the White House will have a multimillion dollar mansion in Washington. I delight in his good fortune. It is only appropriate that one who has devoted his presidency to serving the wealthy (and the military, for such assistance is ideologically conjoined) should live closely to, and in the manner keeping with, his clientage. In that way, he can summon, or be summoned (less likely), on the spot.

Of course a nine-bedroom residence and presumably a private jet, his own or at his disposal, costs money. But all of us concerned for his welfare are relieved to know that household and other expenses will be at least partially met by the proposed signing agreement promised to be in the neighborhood of \$25M for three books (and his wife, Michelle, for her memoirs, an additional \$10M).

This is as it should be. Devotion to plutocracy and militarism, in a society which prioritizes them next to God in importance, and as revelatory of the Nation's spirit, has rightfully earned such rewards from a grateful public. Staring down Russia and China stiffens our people's spinal column, makes each and every person (absent illegals) proud of a heritage of anticommunism, keepers of the faith of international capitalism, on which we dwell and daily praise.

Obama, the quintessential warmonger (cum Nobel laureate), is an engrossing study in power, articulating perfectly the ethos of capitalist striving, so that the personal factor—his own—has a role in both modes of activity: a sure-footed entitlement to lead, according to one's lights, and an equally certain entitlement to pecuniary success. To command, and receive worshipful gratitude in return (Leader of the Free World), is matched, as if making up for prior deprivation, by a positive lust for wealth, status, position—never enough, once tasted. Obama's solicitous regard for those enjoying wealth and power is come by honestly, the twin pursuit inscribed in his experience and personality.

Also come by honestly (though twisted out of shape) is his despisement of softness, weakness, which is to be equated with democracy, transparent government, civil liberties, all of which he violates at every opportunity to prove his Americanism and his own moral character. Among his testaments to worthiness as a national leader is his practice, through Executive action, of targeted drone assassination. Mindful of his solemn obligation to keeping the American people safe, he clearly values his title of Commander-in-Chief as much as he does POTUS. Together that gives him unquestioned license to expand Executive Authority, carrying into such areas as massive surveillance of the people, employment of the Espionage Act to ferret out dissent, and assemble a Cabinet fully subscribing to his geopolitical aims of disproportionate world influence in a framework of unilateral military-commercial-financial-ideological dominance.

One proud achievement, symbolizing the whole, is the retention of Guantanamo, validating the principle of indefinite detention. Again, solicitous of Americans' well-being, not wanting to harm moral sensibilities, Guantanamo, for him, is a shining example of conducting torture with impunity, out of the limelight so that no-one is disturbed at home. This is part of a larger grasp of what constitutes ethical policy making, embodied in humanitarian interventionism and regime change, which rescues victims of Left oppression and repression. Guantanamo, then, is code for the genius of American freedom: an outpost for instructing the heathen in the ways of true democracy

(unadorned capitalism, without such frills as rule of law, equitable distribution of wealth and power, respect for human dignity in all its forms).

If I may be so bold, Mr. President, I respectfully urge you, before occupying your Washington mansion, to spend a year, upon leaving office, in a Guantanamo jail cell. The stay should prove exhilarating, a sojourn into the mental landscape of true Americanism, where after your noble service you have earned the right to view the fruits of your labors. Then, returning home to Washington, you will feel inspired to offer guidance on how best to keep the military and intelligence communities on their toes. Private instruction in the arts of waterboarding and electric-shock treatment will keep you up to speed on current events and the ability to carry on a proper discourse with colleagues in government, think tanks, and academia. A grateful nation is at your feet, profiting from your knowledge of and thirst for hegemony, and should the need be, a resort to nuclear war.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

### **Fascism Trumps Democracy: America, A State of Impunity**

Notwithstanding my title's oblique reference to Trump, he is not the greater of the dangers now facing America, but an entirely known factor, representing a gut incipient fascism grounded primarily in capital accumulation, a nymphomaniac drive for ownership, deal-making, undisguised prestige—in short, the very traits becoming to American's wish for wealth, power, and status on which its system of capitalism is based. Ethnocentrism gives it a psychological heart, sheer ignorance of humane sensibility, a soul, indifference to the humiliation and destruction of others because of capitalism's workings, a modal personality and societal mental set. We've had many examples of The Donald up-and-down the line, from the 10%, 5%, 1%, down to the bottom of the social-class scale, that being how effective false consciousness has been disseminated downward through the American value system. He presently vibrates with what appears to be a significant portion of the working class. So be it; at least the portents and record are *there* for fighting back.

Not so the Obamas and Clintons in our midst, largely free from serious criticism by a supine, homogenized radicalism, chanting the “lesser-of-two-evils” song on the way, not to the gas chambers (not even Trump has, as yet, gone this far), but a manifestation and structure of liberal fascism, possibly more militaristic, more ensconced deeply in a Cold War mental set, talking a good game on immigration while actively promoting a class-state of monopolism equal to anything Trump favors. We have then a condition of growing fascistization with little internal checks and differentiate primarily by rhetorical flourishes. Obama is the point man, exceeding his predecessors, in global counterrevolution, intervention, regime change, and the steady pressures toward confrontation with, above all, China, but also Russia. Meanwhile, Clinton fits the bill, perhaps more viscerally combative, with Russia, rather than China, the chief ADVERSARY. (Caps. are necessary, because the US cannot exist, much less thrive, without an enemy, whether for the mammoth defense industry, an hegemonic foreign policy, or the social discipline at home, to keep the internal market going, ferret out dissent on policy, favor the already enriched and favored.)

Stealth destroyers, appropriation \$4B+, already noticed in today's Times; the safety net grows more outmoded, environmental degradation and pollution continue apace, the murder rate in Chicago and other major cities climbs, but imperialism is, literally, business-as-usual. And business

itself is business as usual: Bank of America last week's poster boy of questionable behavior. "You break it, you own it" might be the slogan in a small business souvenir shop, but what of the bigger picture? American business, notably, railroads and banking, by the mid-19th century, had already broken the promise of democracy, and fixing the system on democratic lines has grown more remote with time. That is where "fascism" is not an expletive, but reality: the interpenetration of business and government, capitalism and the State, the cozy amalgam of wealth, power, the military, which even the strongest chisel could not pry them apart.

Germany had its form, Italy, its, Japan, its, all signifying cultural and linguistic differences, but not systemic ones, capitalism in each case, and the social structure of hierarchy it created, the determinative factor in shaping the polity and its purposes of Order, deservedly the dirtiest word in the political lexicon. Everyone knows his/her place in a fascist social order. Substantive protest is muted, whether through repression or indoctrination. America now joins the 20th century's historical Big Three of fascist persuasion, relying more on indoctrination than explicit, overt repression. Fly-over military jets at football games is the Pavlovian reminder of requisite patriotism to be considered, and consider oneself, the Good American. (Trump merely echoes the man-in-the-street, his difference being a silk shirt for a denim work shirt.) But it is Clinton who deserves, and has earned the respect, of all right-thinking Americans, parroting the vitriol of the defense intellectuals, propaganda masters (even Axelrod in today's paper seems to have become critical), her controlled shrillness, backed by her husband's man-of-destiny complex, posing more serious risks for putting nails into the coffin of democracy.

Why choose either, Trump or Clinton? Elections are rigged, not by corruption, but, more profoundly, by the political culture and class structure of the society, the candidates merely the façade for several centuries of political-economic-ideological development, cumulative, self-renewing, above all, hubristic, i.e., exaggerated pride, the Chosen, backed by the military force to cram it down the throats of all and sundry, where "friends and allies" become, for these purposes of unilateral global dominance, indistinguishable from adversaries and enemies in successfully maintaining claims of leadership and greatness.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2016

### **Obama-Clinton: Siamese Twins of Reaction**

Language is corruptive, giving legitimacy to present-day power relations, screening out critical meaning and analysis as fortifying existing power. Thus, liberalism, already in the 18th century code for a propertied-society valuing exclusive appropriation of wealth is stretched in 21st century America into a Cold War mental set that sanctions capitalism down the line, its militaristic underpinnings of survival and growth, and the commodification of the individual, socially regimented to represent the integration of patriotism and consumerism. From the standpoint of human freedom, there is little to choose between it and its supposed antithesis, conservatism. Both, as practiced in the US, lead to alienation and war, one needful of the other to stomach the national aspiration of global hegemony.

What brings on this seeming tirade? Simply, the hollowness and moral emptiness of the present Administration, which, by default, allows its presumed opposite to have credence, gain support, and participate, as a joint-partner, in the stimulation of false consciousness leading to an unqualified

acceptance of capitalism in its true complexion as the systemic historical vehicle for inequality, expansion, aggression, reproducing within the society the features projected onto the world: a regimentation of sameness in thought and practice, an ideology of greed and selfishness interlaced with mistrust of Others, a compulsion to barbaric acts when viewed as the advancement of self-interest.

Obama's recent seeming concessions to environmentalism, as though cleansing his bloody hands of armed drone targeted assassination, is a case in point: policy is unitary, setting aside national monuments not offsetting the nuclear modernization of America's destructive force, its engagement in regime change, its mounting of global paramilitary and related operations, its drive—despite reports of national income gains—to increase/intensify wealth-differentiation, and with it, the basis of status, power, and ideological acceptance, all leaving not-so-pristine forests and lakes and atmosphere, sullied by the stench of war crimes, domestic hardship, a people of bitterness disguised as superiority.

But why single out liberals (for our purposes here, Democrats) when a presumed greater menace lies on the horizon, or rather, is conspicuously present: Trump and Republicans? I revert to the 1940s, a more straight-talking time, when words had their designated meaning. Confronted with The Donald, we would have characterized him as a political douchebag, dumb in all things save wealth acquisition, and on that score, beneath contempt for chasing the dollar as a private God, warmed-over fakery his stock-in-trade, altogether detestable were the society not already in conformity with his self-image. But it is, or is becoming so; and here we see the convergence of the Obama-Clinton and Trump syndromes, slightly alternative paths to the same destination: contemptuous of all that does not serve wealth and wealth-making.

The world's people are so many inanimate integers to be plotted, victimized, abandoned when it suits, herded into settings and situations where profits can be extracted from them, looked down on and condemned so that they become habituated to subordination, a procession fed into the maw of capitalism. Could Putin and Xi possibly be any worse, either to their own people or the larger world? In fact, Putin and Xi are vital to American interests, inducing a patriotic response to any who might dissent from America's hegemonic claims. Invoke the devil, to silence the worthy. Democrats and Republicans alike are skilled practitioners in red-baiting, and with rare exceptions, like the New Deal, always have been (with Wilsonian liberalism leading the charge in modern times). This is to say, Obama-Clinton, by articulating so well and so subtly the Right, legitimate Trump, who might, given substantive alternatives, stand out instead as the Clown Prince of Native Fascism. He doesn't, because they, too, are playing on the same court, giving him ample wiggle-room to score at will.

Obama-Clinton extends the range of Reactionary politics, society, and governance, and makes them respectable, Trump merely polishing the rough edges. We await the verdict, not with trepidation, however, but with disgust. Anyone who can see light between the two candidates is a better observer than I—and parenthetically, I still want, for the sake of consistency and conscience, to see more done with foreign policy from the third parties. This is no time to be single-factored in agitation and presentation of an agenda. If policy is unitary, for all sides, issues are interrelated. One cannot speak on behalf of the environment, and simultaneously fail to make distinctions on the international scene. I realize this is unpopular to say, but Putin is not Obama-Clinton, and does not merit the demonization presently accorded him to make the American Left appear more patriotic.

And even if he were equally reprehensible (a good 1940s word, like *douchebag*), America has its own problems to straighten out and rectify.

SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

### **Obama Plays the Race Card: Vile Politics on Demand**

Obama takes personally black millennials' lukewarm support of Clinton, as though a mark of disrespect, disloyalty, lack of gratitude, unconcern about his own legacy—when he has done so much to advance the cause of black rights (even symbolically, his presence as POTUS). But what is his legacy? And why should blacks celebrate his tenure, much less esteem him as a person?

Obama's legacy begins with armed drones for targeted assassination, a hands-on President, meeting with likeminded national security advisers off the Situation Room on Terror Tuesdays to identify, authorize, and give the plan to execute political murder, a present-day example of lynching from 8,000 miles away. No president in US history has so involved himself in the details of executing others. And no president has been so flippant in shrugging off the results of "collateral damage" (as witness this past week in Syria).

Washington has become a center of ghoulishness under his watch. Can blacks or anyone else with conscience shrug off the consequences of such immoral acts, particularly, for blacks, the insult of being invited to be complicit in the ways of evil? If Dr. King were alive, would he urge support for Obama, and now, Obama's effort to elect Clinton? Would Clinton, devoted to war, war preparation, hawkish in every fiber of her immoral being, even be the Democratic nominee, if Obama had not already had two terms in the presidency, despoiling, perhaps permanently, a party that once gave us FDR, Henry Wallace, Adlai Stevenson, George McGovern, fair, decent individuals sincere about the cause of peace?

Obama's legacy does not stop with assassination, but spreads in geometric proportion to intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, a basketful of militarism capped by, first, confrontation with Russia (egging NATO on to the Russian borders), and now more decisively, confrontation with China, via battleships, carrier groups, B52 flyovers, joint military maneuvers in adjacent areas, all for the purpose of encirclement, isolation, containment, perhaps—in Obama's further embellishment of his legacy—rollback (to Third World dependence) à la John Foster Dulles.

Obama and Clinton are indistinguishable when it comes to belligerence, nuclear-arsenal modernization, deregulation, sympathy for Wall Street, chicanery, egomania, stealth and fear of transparency, hardly suited for a society that professes belief in democracy. If Obama has the likes of John Brennan in his entourage, Clinton has her husband, and the Family Foundation doing the dirty work of American foreign policy via the avenue of personal enrichment. Does all of this in any way force one into the arms of Trump? No, nonsense, not likely. It merely reveals the moral bankruptcy of today's American political leadership.

Trump is a dangerous charlatan, Obama and Clinton occupying the same ideological ground with slightly more sophistication and political savvy. Would you buy a used car from any of the three? Would you entrust world peace or the life and well-being of your child or grandchild to any of the three? Perhaps the remedy, such as it is, is to boycott the polls, march on election day to show your

contempt for such villainy, stand in earth-shattering silence, in places of public visibility (as we did in civil rights and antiwar protests years ago—when there was a better America), displaying contempt for the ruthlessness and deviousness of our so-called leaders. Their skins are thick. They won't change their behavior and values, or even recognize the disapproval being expressed. Of course not, because they are empty souls used to self-promotion as a way of life, over the bodies of those they victimize.

Fifty-or-so days left: more crocodile tears lamenting lack of affection and loyalty, as meanwhile Obama, Clinton, Trump, the Three Musketeers of American fascism, plan new ways of inveigling themselves, their schemes, their thirst for aggrandizement, into the hearts of the American public.

SEPTEMBER 23, 2016

### **Sovereign Immunity, War Crimes, and Compensation to 9/11 Families**

Sovereign immunity is a doctrine in international law which exempts nations from responsibility for their aggressive actions. It sanctions war crimes under the fiction that governments are not behind the doings of their citizens—and by implication, government itself. Thus, e.g., the My Lai Massacre could not be charged against the United States Government (USG), but only individuals like Lt. Calley. There is no recourse for the families of murdered victims against the country responsible, say, for armed drone targeted assassination, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, saturation bombing, waterboarding, etc. International law, especially on sovereign immunity, is written by the strong, the conqueror, the hegemonic, not the preyed on or the product of abstract moral reasoning.

Power becomes its own morality. One can see from the foregoing that the US would be skittish, not to say downright fearful, about overturning the principle of sovereign immunity. I am hardly the first to suggest that America is the leading purveyor of violence in the world today. It is not surprising that the US passed legislation in 1976 (although no-one speaks of it, American-commissioned atrocities in Vietnam may have had something to do with it) which provided exemption—on grounds of sovereign immunity—from legal suits for nations faced with legal actions for crimes committed in America. The principle had to be nailed down, if reciprocal privileges of immunity from lawsuits for American crimes abroad were to be respected. Again, international law, the big tent for hiding crimes instead of protecting the innocent.

But then we have 9/11, perhaps the most emotional-political-ideological symbol influencing US policymaking in recent times. Compensation must be provided the families of the victims, the 1976 legislation notwithstanding. Accordingly, Congress, beginning in last May, sought to alter the existing law, and did so by lopsided majorities—from the standpoint of national patriotism a no-brainer. Except for one thing: the 1976 legislation, now abrogated, had been seen as the ultimate barrier to punishment for American war crimes, and messing with the new legislation (i.e. a presidential veto) would leave the USG vulnerable to legal action.

Obama earlier promised to veto the legislation after it had passed both houses of Congress, a promise to be carried out tomorrow (September 23). At first sight, this is mind-boggling, the Supreme American Patriot placing himself in opposition to the 9/11 families. What goes on? Seemingly the Master of Expediency is losing his marbles. Not quite, and rather, a new page in



Obama's villainy is opened. He will not give the real reasons for his decision to veto the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, pleading instead vague national security considerations, opening America to frivolous suits when we are merely acting in the nation's interest, also, unnecessarily antagonizing a valued ally, Saudi Arabia, which has repeatedly denied all involvement in 9/11.

Here the Administration to make its case has just released (Tuesday) a letter to Congress—actually issued by the Saudis—claiming the high moral ground for sovereign immunity: “The safety and security of our diplomats, intelligence officers, military and other senior officials of the U.S. government, and their ability to perform their duties without foreign influence or intervention, would be seriously imperiled by a process intent on denying them the international immunities that have been accepted by all civilized nations since the 16th century and earlier.”

I liked that last little flourish/claim. It only gets better, the letter having been signed by William Cohen, Michael Mukasey, Steven Hadley, and Richard Clarke, hardly your American Friends Service Committee members seeking world peace. Nary a word in explanation (nor would any be forthcoming) on the main purpose of the veto—the secondary one being closeness to Saudi Arabia, as witness the Senate on Wednesday beating back the attempt to prevent Obama's \$1.5B arms sale to the Saudis. What have we then? White House lawyers obliquely give the answer when they say that the Act compromises the principle of sovereign immunity, which, central to international law, as I noted, immunizes state actors from legal prosecution for their acts.

Cutting to the chase, I submit Obama risks public opprobrium because he wants to save the United States from liability for the commission of war crimes. Compensation can be arranged some other way, if at all. But continued targeted assassination, more and further dangerous confrontation with Russia and China, counterrevolution, in sum, the whole American posture vis-à-vis the World Community, would be jeopardized by the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act. It had to be vetoed, if America was to be free to continue on its path of unilateral global hegemony. That it is already being thwarted by the rise and reality of a multipolar structure of power only gives added encouragement to toughen it out on the question of war crimes and sovereign immunity.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2016

### **The Great Debate: Proto-Fascism vs. the Real Thing**

From the subtitle, it is hard to know which is which; perhaps it would be better to say, “Equal Voices of Fascism,” so as not to indicate a preference for this race to the ideological bottom. Clinton and Trump equally menace human freedom, one through war, confrontation, and as the benefactor of wealth, the other, militarism and wealth itself. Together they favor power vested in upper groups in a framework of Total Order. Perhaps their sole difference lies in the paradigm each offers of the long-term development of monopoly capitalism, a question of means, not the end-result of the financialization and militarization of the System itself: i.e., varieties in the form of fascism.

Stated differently, the outcome rests on the internal pacification of working people in America (as well as global unilateral hegemony, in aspiration if no-longer-possible fact), turning on whether or not repression is central to social control. The best that can be said for Clinton is that the

concentration camp/gas chamber syndrome is structurally and historically avoidable because her confidence in advanced capitalism and its ruling parties—chiefly, banking, industry, business, the military—can do the work of co-optation and absorption of the working class, obviating the need for overt force. I would term this, liberal fascism or the fascistization of liberalism. Neither one is oxymoronic, given liberalism’s ideological sanctioning of wealth accumulation and penchant for war and expansion—the foregoing ingrained in what C.B. Macpherson called, “possessive individualism”—only that, as now, liberalism in America fuses Capitalism, the State, and Militarism.

Thus, Clinton, for the present, need not go the path familiar to fascism in its Nazification mode. Her sympathy for, dedication to, and confidence in, capitalistic upper groups suffices to keep repression normalized through garden-variety indoctrination of consumerism and heightened patriotism, appealing to working people and minorities as their friend, indeed, champion, and counselor, while Trump is portrayed as an unreliable, gauche, Neanderthal-like figure (not necessarily off-base) who is essentially winging-it into a nebulous future. Wrong. Trump is Clinton stripped of liberal sophistication, i.e., a more truthful version of Clinton because he does not hide his attachment to war, confrontation (but see below the Putin-corrective to his arsenal of policy), ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and personal contempt for what each views as softness and weakness whenever America does not maximize its muscle-power.

Clinton is unintelligible without Goldman Sachs, as symbol and actuality of her deepest convictions, a camp follower of wealth-power-status dating back at least to her Goldwater-girl days, traversing a course of war-hawk proclivities and demeanor that in prideful assertion has never let up. (The Clintons have been notoriously bold in their enjoyment of both their close association with, and the largesse dispensed by, Goldman to their personal and so-called philanthropic coffers.) Precisely the Democratic contribution to that perpetual-Cold-War atmosphere is what makes a Trump legitimate and respectable. There are no longer any boundaries to America’s chiliastic quest for permanent greatness and dominance, particularly when liberalism underwrites the worst nightmares—from a democratic standpoint—of conservatism and reaction. Trump gets away with what he does, politically, ideologically, financially, because he goes several baby-steps beyond Clinton in the same policy-and-personal direction.

Trump, like Clinton, is no angel. If one represents a temporary respite from the degree of harsh punitiveness of overt fascism, the other is capable, in his idea of deportation of undocumented immigrants, of tapping the wellsprings of utter hostility (and the consequent punishment) of whomever he fears, contemns, or, push comes to shove, merely disfavors. Law is a plaything to both candidates, each one exhibiting the potential for unleashing violence at home or abroad. Trump, however, less sophisticated than Clinton, cannot trust as fully the assimilative powers of American ideology and its habituation of the populace to unrestrained capitalism (even though he has been a chief beneficiary of those powers) which derive from the political-cultural means of inducing the pacification of all those below the upper-middle or lower-upper class. For him, America is a bastion of wealth to those who are privileged, otherwise a wasteland to those undeserving. Clinton, by her actions, despite her rhetoric, might draw the line of stratification only slightly lower. We are left, then, with one who may elect more forceful means of social control more quickly (treatment of immigrants setting the precedent), but for either one Wealth and Power are in the driver’s seat.

In preparation for the debate, the New York Times jumped the gun yesterday with an editorial endorsing Clinton, “Hillary Clinton for President,” (Sept. 25), unintentionally revealing, by its near-categorical acceptance of her record and position, its own (similar) moral bankruptcy. It is worth noting its themes of acceptance, which includes, recognizing a fellow spirit in Clinton, a reactivated Cold War (it never really ended!) promoting conflict and confrontation with Russia and China, American exclusive global hegemony, and the adoption of realism (i.e., unilateral self-interest in foreign policy, an obliging working class, in domestic) in conducting policy.

Here are some highlights from the editorial. The Times praises her at the outset because, when becoming senator from New York, and assigned to Senate Armed Services, her work “earned the respect of Republicans like Senator John McCain with her determination to master intricate military matters.” (A peacenik, she’s not.) Among “[h]er most lasting achievements” was “an expansion of military benefits to cover reservists and the National Guard,” while apparently she can do no wrong even when she does wrong: “Her vote in favor of the Iraq war is a black mark, but to her credit, she has explained her thinking rather than trying to rewrite that history.” The same free pass as Secretary of State (pulling chestnuts out of the fire): “She bears a share of the responsibility for the Obama administration’s foreign-policy failings in Libya [NYT does not explain what those failings are]. But her achievements are substantial.” Not mentioned, e.g., is Clinton’s call for a greater number of troops in the Afghan surge than the Pentagon requested.

On foreign policy, the Times is positively vacuous, or worse, misleading. TPP is seen only in terms of trade, not a geopolitical framework to contain and isolate China, while the loaded term “reset” jumps from the page with respect to Russia: “She helped promote the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an important trade counterweight to China and a key component of the Obama administration’s pivot to Asia.... Mrs. Clinton’s attempt to reset relations with Russia, though far from successful, was a sensible effort to improve interactions with a rivalrous nuclear power.” And what might they be? Again, silence from the paper, as in the US using NATO to march up to the Russian border (similar to America’s own movements in the South China Sea and encouraging Japan’s nuclear development).

But perhaps my favorite sentence from the editorial, combining hegemony and presumed do-goodism, is this: “Mrs. Clinton has shown herself to be a realist who believes America cannot simply withdraw behind oceans and walls, but must engage confidently in the world to protect its interests and be true to its values, which include helping others escape poverty and oppression.” True, “She has evinced a lamentable penchant for secrecy and made a poor decision to rely on a private email server while at the State Department. That decision deserved scrutiny, and it’s had it.” (my italics) That’s as far as the Times goes in criticism—nowhere: “Now, considered alongside the real challenges that will occupy the next president, that email server...looks like a matter for the help desk.” The editorial’s closing words are inspiring: “Through war and recession, Americans born since 9/11 have had to grow up fast, and they deserve a grown-up president. A lifetime’s commitment to solving problems in the real world qualifies Hillary Clinton for the job, and the country should put her to work.” A sad performance on the part of a newspaper which prides itself on the motto, “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” and suppresses from half to two thirds of the story, particularly her closeness to business, finance, and the military.

Today the Times in a companion editorial lowered the boom on Trump, “Why Donald Trump Should Not Be President,” (Sept. 26), unexceptionable in its criticism, except (a) it steers away

from the more serious point about his proto-fascist leanings, and (b) also evades a comparative evaluation of Clinton, which on both domestic- and foreign-policy grounds equally matches up. Militarism and plutocracy are no strangers to both. The Times comes down extremely hard on Trump for what one takes to be the obvious (in the subtitle calling him “a man who dwells in bigotry, bluster and false promises”), like shooting a bevy of quail with a high-powered rifle in a small bathtub. His “views were matters of dangerous impulse and cynical pandering rather than thoughtful politics.” So what else is new?

Trump is “feisty,” and “a man far more consumed with himself than with the nation’s well-being.” Correctly, the paper questions his business dealings, tax dodging, “self-dealing,” lack of “experience in foreign policy,” use of “anti-immigrant, nativist and racist signals...to build his base,” and avoidance of reporters’ questions. (When was the last time Clinton held a news conference?) But what most angers the Times about Trump’s candidacy is his foreign policy, notably, his doubts about NATO and expression “of admiration for the Russian president”: “Voters should consider what sort of deals Mr. Putin might obtain if Mr. Trump, his admirer, wins the White House.” (Red-baiting has not gone out of style.) The editorial concludes, “Our presidents are role models for generations of our children. Is this the example we want for them?” I would pose the same question of Clinton, and my answer would be the same, a resounding “No.”

Later. The debate is over. Claims of victory are already in the air. Talking heads are unloading their wisdom, with some desperation searching for the penetrating insight, foci of attention, a hidden meaning—and, for me, a near-absolute blank. The debate proved to be a non-event, the avoidance of substance in favor of one-upmanship over vaguely drawn questions. Nothing was said that contradicted, or modified, what is set forth above: a common essential posture of reaction which failed, despite sweet talk directed to minorities, formulas of economic growth, and professions of national greatness and strength, to move the goal posts away from incipient fascism. Here a verbatim transcript would not help; neither Clinton nor Trump transcended the mold of patriotic stasis to strike out boldly in a new direction. Both candidates peddled their customary wares, one denouncing Russia, the other China; one praising the American spirit, the other bemoaning the flight of manufacturing; each one probing vulnerable areas in the other’s personal character; no-one of the two providing offsets to and criticisms of the fundamentals of US foreign policy.

Does it matter who “won” or “lost,” when it is the country that is on a collision course with history? The basic profile of both domestic and foreign policy remained unchanged, which means drastically skewed income distribution at home, intervention and regime change abroad. Smugness of one was met by arrogance of the other. Whether NATO or autarky, respectively, was favored, it doesn’t matter, because hegemony remained the Holy Grail. In that regard, the differences on public policy, if believed, were never brought out, and probably were not meant to be. I confess, on one hand, to be dispirited, and on the other, not to have expected more. Perhaps one needs to revise one’s definition of fascism, to accord more room to bread-and-circuses as the means of instilling a faith in “democracy” in the public, when in fact business tyranny rules the roost and militarism becomes the latest flavor of false consciousness. My Comments to the New York Times, the first, on the editorial, “Hillary Clinton for President,” (Sept. 25), and the second, the editorial, “Why Donald Trump Should Not Be President,” (Sept. 26), follow:

I "...a matter for the help desk." The whole editorial is an apologia for a ruthless, careerist, not terribly bright individual with a strong penchant for grazing the truth. It could have been written by one of her advisers or her press secretary.

Because Trump is so bad does not warrant approval of Clinton, the latter currently the best the Democratic party can do, and hardly of the moral character and political wisdom of, say, Adlai Stevenson. It is indicative of the editorial's undue partiality and social myopia that not a word is found on Clinton's relations to Wall Street, defense contractors, pharmaceutical giants, nor, except in vague passing, her credentials as a war hawk supreme.

Perhaps the blind spot can be explained by The Times's own preferences in policy: corporate and banking favoritism, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations. The paper has aligned itself with a party hardly deserving commendation, whether on democracy or human rights. In contrast, speaking truth to power would require condemnation of both candidates, not in the service of a third party, but as upholding the principle of non-complicity with evil and mediocrity.

But no, the paper does not understand that "realism," used to describe Clinton, can be an accommodation with vileness in the long term, when shortcuts are made. The paper reveals its true colors by its ideological-political shallowness, its want of authentic realism.

II "Is this the example we want for them?" No, clearly. Yet when one pairs this editorial with that on Clinton, one finds that dumping on Trump, however merited, is not matched by well-placed criticism of Clinton's record and character. By the latter I mean unstoppable ambition, fierceness on military policy, regime change, and support of Wall Street. In fact, the two candidates are hardly distinguishable—both flawed, neither one to be trusted on matters of state.

Why give credence even to a "lesser-of-two-evils" argument, when evil is a bipartisan affliction? This does not mean, necessarily, go out and support a third party. It means, speak truth to power and condemn the proceedings as a denial of human rights and democratic government. An honest position would be to recognize that America is no longer a just polity, and instead, a class-state tipping toward fascism. Of the two candidates and their supporting parties, both favor wealth concentration, and neither accepts basic principles of international law.

The Times would serve the nation better by admitting the dangers ahead, from a renewed, intensified Cold War to sharpening divisions in domestic wealth and power. Detraction from Trump is ever so easy, a thoroughly reprehensible figure, but why go from the frying pan into the fire by accepting, or even accommodating to, one as opportunist as Clinton? Thinking back to FDR and the New Deal, one's heart aches for what awaits America, from belligerence to mediocrity.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

### **The "Self-Hating" Jew: A Critique**

The test of Judaism is to be an uncompromising supporter of Israel. I reject that. Shimon Peres's death brought out an avalanche of encomiums. To raise one word of criticism, his early stand on the settlements, his atrocities in Lebanon, his failure, supposedly changing his overall position, then to confront head-on, Israeli militarism, brings on one a tirade of abuse. There must be unanimity, particularly among Jews, like myself, or else subject to the charge of traitorous conduct if not

worse. Today, in response to NYT's Roger Cohen article, "Peres and the Passing of Hope," I wrote a Comment (see below) and was denounced by a reader as a "ghetto Jew," one hiding behind walls of fear, and not granting Israel's supreme goodness and democracy.

No, not a ghetto Jew who has slunk away from slights and an inferiority complex, but fiercely proud of being Jewish, contesting all my life against anti-Semitism, but with several provisions: that to be Jewish carries with it, historically, the special responsibility to lock arms with all who have been persecuted and the victims of social injustice. Symbolically, I turn to Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger (see my CP obit., Jan. 2014), Dr. King, Eugene Debs, the proudly standing humanists and members of the Left, including, particularly in the trenches, like Schwerner and Goodman, along with Cheney, not Netanyahu, Adelson in America, the tribalists who demand complete obedience to policies of exclusion and ruthlessness.

Israel disgraces, tears down, ridicules Judaism, a once-living creed of compassion for, and struggling on behalf of, the dispossessed, the poor, the dissidents, yes, the Rosenbergs and Rosa Luxemburg, the avowedly radical, who have only contempt for those who rely on force, arrogance, and a sense of superiority. By that token, Peres was better than most Israelis, yet failed to stand up to fascistic tendencies of a Greater Israel. To that extent, he lent respectability and legitimation to the nation and its hard-liners by not going into unequivocal opposition. He, again, better than most, was not a son of Torah, agitating with every fiber of his being against Israelis' daily infliction of humiliation on the Palestinians. Rather than president, prime minister, etc. etc., it takes courage to say NO to the war machine, those complicit in the crimes of intervention, assassination, regime change, evident in the record of the US, which has Israel's back, as does Israel its back, whenever possible. Indeed, today in America, a self-respecting Jew cannot be critical of the policies and record of either nation. I reject that identity.

My New York Times Comment on the Cohen article (Jan. 29), same date, follows:

"And now?" Schlaim's words, "chang[ing] his image from Mr. Peace to Mr. Security," describes why Peres is not the saint, the visionary, a role we almost unanimously accord to him. The contradictions were there from the start. Advocate for military strength and nuclear development is not a harmless avocation. One pairs Peace and Security in such a way as to make them incompatible.

If Peres were truly courageous, he would have been a stronger critic of Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, and a stronger critic of Israel's international posture, which gave carte blanche to American foreign policy and tended to support dictators globally. The sad fact is that Peres is the best that Israel could produce, a giant set beside Netanyahu, but hardly a man of peace and social justice.

I regret having to say that. I am not a self-hating Jew, the conventional put-down, but one deeply admiring of Judaism, both as a world religion and beacon of freedom in years past in America. Much has changed. Israel has transformed American Jewry from a progressive social force, whether on race, politics, or economics, into a people of knee-jerk extreme conservatism and reaction. Go back to the New Deal period, a time when one could proudly, as a Jew, claim the mantle of defender of the poor, defender of labor, defender of human rights and justice.

I wish Peres had shown more guts in standing up to Israel ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and militarism. He then would deserve the eulogies.

OCTOBER 4, 2016

### **Capitalism Versus Militarism: The Presidency**

There are no purist societal categories in the real world; everything turns on interrelatedness, particularly here, with capitalism and militarism, mutual states of national conduct and spirit, each reinforcing the other, and both exemplified in the narrow boundaries within which the American presidential campaign is being conducted.

Trump (capitalism), Clinton (militarism), constitute the perfect harmonization of interests defining the modern Fascist State, one up on Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and Corporatist Italy, because disguising such primal units of historically demonstrated fascism (1920s-40s) as hegemonic aspirations of global leadership, the structural interpenetration of business and government, an ideological commitment to systemic hierarchy, international and domestic, with the soothing appeal of liberalism and democracy, rhetorical gestures America's predecessors did not waste time with, in proceeding to the serious business of domination.

Pure typologies are for textbooks. In America, capitalism and militarism blended well, indeed became synchronized from at least the post-Civil War period onward, neither capitalism nor militarism capable of going it alone even as individually each grew to major proportions. There had to be overlap, with few periods of historical exception, perhaps only the New Deal, where the repair of capitalism, putting it on its feet again, consumed the energies of policy making until the Second World War became unavoidable. Then, in what still remained, by necessity, an anti-fascist crusade, nonetheless, under the umbrella of patriotism, capitalism and militarism were brought together into an uneasy coalescence.

With the Cold War, this changed, and the respective emphases in national policies were becoming inseparable, with, in America, market penetration and intervention singly and, more generally, in combination, characterizing America's pattern of development. By the 1960s, especially under Kennedy, there was very little squiggle room left between these supposedly polar types or goal posts. America's structural-political-ideological choices had narrowed successively and gradually so that, unsurprisingly, Trump and Clinton have now emerged, if not as Siamese twins joined at the hip of the highest stage of capitalism known thus far, then close to that state, where confrontation, in all areas, from military power to trade and finance, makes for an irresistible force in international politics, Russia and China, the preeminent opponents and/or targets of America's somehow-manufactured wrath.

These two exemplifications in their respective areas, Trump, capitalism, Clinton, militarism, represent mere tipping points, where, for Trump, capitalism works through, and cannot survive without, militarism, and where, for Clinton, militarism is the frosting on the cake, the ultimate good—and goal—of capitalism in protecting, chiefly for America, unilateral supremacy in world affairs. The record is there. Trump embodies capitalism better than any in our time, going back to the attitudinal complex and framework of rewards of the Robber Barons of the late 19th century, completely unapologetic in manipulating the System to his own advancement: wreck, build, it

doesn't matter, even both, simultaneously, because profit is to be made, or losses stemmed, through always plunging forward, through waste, corruption, exploitation, all honorable—and honored—tools in the pursuit of wealth.

Clinton is his mirror image in the fusion of capitalism with national power, not a bone of scrupulosity in her body as she navigates the corridors of power to the top. Here Wall Street becomes the open door or avenue of systemic advancement to achieve the integrated stage of the militarization of capitalism. Not an original thinker (nor is Trump) she merely assumes, it turns out correctly, that capitalism and militarism require each other to experience growth and fruition. We see this in her prideful assertion of belting 'em down with top military brass as one of the boys, equally symbolic of underlying substance, her calling for the Afghan surge, intervention in Libya, bellicose view of Russia and China, approval of military appropriations in general (in sum, hardly out of the ordinary from her Democratic colleagues and the bipartisan consensus on American-defined globalization in all spheres of state activity, from Keystone XL to regime change in Latin America to military alliance systems worldwide).

What does this portend for the future, the Clinton-Trump race to the bottom, the ash heap of history? Nuclear war? Widening divisions at home, on race, power, income, status? Incremental worsening, wherein ethnocentrism and xenophobia find their domestic counterparts, the radical becoming the stranger, the Enemy, of America's culture and time? Whatever the outcome, and I am certainly not recommending fatalism or passivity, the future cannot be thought bright. Perhaps, with Dr. King's blessing, we can go back to the political equivalence of Du Bois's Talented Tenth, in this case, the regnant tenth who, in declaring No to both capitalism (as presently practiced) and militarism, stand witness to the degradation of democracy and refuse complicity in its emasculation and destruction.

Social protest is not dead. Not all of America is fascist-inclined. But the negation of existing practice, the disavowal of previous history (as though these features of capitalism and militarism were deterministic, rather than the result of the institutional exercise of power on behalf of wealth and the wealthy, or the morbidly assertive in generic ways of conquest), must not be given the last word. Even one-tenth of the populace are capable of raising a collective voice of protest that will be heard, if not fully in America, then still around the world. Our modern Robber Barons cum Warriors, reflected in the presidential contest, cannot be stopped, possibly even diverted, but as everyday life grows worse, as adventurism grows more obvious and unbearable to the world at charge, perhaps, just perhaps, a turnaround is possible—the futility of self-destruction finally awakening a heretofore narcotized public.

OCTOBER 5, 2016

### **Centrist Fascism: Lurching Forward**

The third presidential debate, almost by design, was an exercise in obfuscation, neither candidate willing to display an expanded, detailed position which might reveal substance, ideology, political-economic ramifications of her/his policy on fundamental areas affecting America's domestic structure of wealth and power or its international framework of war, intervention, commercial penetration, and regime change. In other words, this was the ideal setting for personalism, a politics of distraction, as systemic-historical forces of interpenetration (of business and government),



paralleled by the related development of militarism, expansion, and social regimentation have become integrated: distilled and fused as a meaningful stage of fascism in America.

This is no ordinary election, but the tipping point in the organization of capitalism as to whether “democracy,” enclosed in quotation marks because having the salience of a class-state from the society’s formation grounded in slavery, hierarchy, unequal wealth-distribution, and finally corporate/monopolistic aggrandizement, an excellent springboard to fascism under conditions of perceived decline and/or stalled internal growth (both operant today), has now turned the corner into a qualitatively different formation. I suspect this has happened gradually over the last half-century, without surrendering the inaccurate designation of democracy. It is, however, an anachronism never intended in the first place, and the candidates show at best the traits of the caudillo, a Franco or Mussolini, but still a far cry from Hitler, or America as Nazi Germany.

Exaggerating the degree of fascism serves no useful purpose. But the portents are nonetheless real, nowhere better seen than in cutting beneath the surface of the final presidential debate. The absence of policy-discussion itself mocks professions of political-ideological differentiation between the major parties. There really is very little, a consensus on the militarism-advanced capitalism nexus which by itself prevents alternative courses of action leading to other than cosmetic variants of what I am terming centrist fascism, a lockstep of ideology, structure, and political culture concentrating power of elite groups which themselves are unified in thought on what might be called full spectrum dominance, whether we speak of foreign economic policy, the environment, or other areas defining modern times.

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There follows a closer look at the debate, the foregoing a prologue to the societal process, long in motion, of lurching (aka, staggering) forward, no longer imperceptible, gradual, toward fully consummated abandonment of democratic institutions and values. At no time before has America faced such an unenviable choice for the presidency, character flaws alone far less determining than policy consequences, in fashioning a government and polity held together by antithetical bonds of mistrust, hate, personal insecurity, and a demiurgic quest for unilateral conquest under unpropitious world conditions, circumstances of great-powers’ hostility and confrontation exacerbating near-inherent tendencies of internal militarism.

In demeanor, neither candidate appeared the paragon of intelligence or honesty, but that need not concern us. What does, is policy or the feigned absence thereof. The first question, on the powers of the Supreme Court and its judicial decisions, the issue came down to support of the Second Amendment, and despite differences on its construction, Clinton’s seeming criticisms or modifications of it become nullified by her statement, “Well, first of all, I support the second amendment.” Although she wants “reasonable regulation” and responsible use, offering more protections than Trump, who pridefully acknowledged the endorsement of the NRA, there is not the clear-cut separation of views necessary, since the issue of gun control is code for, among other things, an outright appeal to militarism, vigilantism, and race, that one looks for in attacking the prevailing gun culture.

Where differences were strong involved cultural politics, particularly abortion, in which, unlike Trump, Clinton favored *Rowe v. Wade*, with Trump ranting that she would be taking the baby and “rip[ping] the baby out of the womb.” My only reservation here as to the question of the candidates’

essential sameness is that, in opposition to my radical colleagues, I view cultural politics less as a test of fundamental civil liberties and civil rights than as a popular diversion from the democratization of structure, power, and the abrogation of imperialism, nuclear war, and racial discrimination.

I know how unpopular such a position is among radicals, and yes, as separate issues I'd of course favor abortion rights and those pertaining to the LGBT community as essential to the wider process of democratization, but (a) less so than equitable income-and-wealth distribution, and (b) on condition that, unlike Clinton, who treats them in a vacuum, the issues such as abortion are joined to wider issues on war and peace, corporate power, indeed, the retention of capitalism, especially in its present form. Conceivably, one could advocate for the full range of demands in cultural politics, and still favor centrist fascism in its systemic-structural-cultural attributes. Clinton embodies such a view, which is one reason I think she cannot be sufficiently distinguished from Trump. Wall Street can absorb cultural politics; it cannot, by definition, steps leading to the advent of socialism. Authenticity of, and gradations of, radicalism are matters of extreme importance, not simply for analytical purposes, but on the practice of capitalistic absorption of discontent. Currently, cultural politics are the help-mate of the status quo. I say this not as a hard-bitten Stalinist, but as an ordinary radical of the old kind.

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The moderator Chris Wallace, turned next to the topic of immigration, where the Trumpean symbol of the Wall looms largely in the discussion. Trump summarizes, "Drugs are pouring in through the border. We have no country if we have no border. Hillary wants to give amnesty. She wants to have open borders." An open-and-shut case of principal differences? Despite her deeply moving appeal for the protection of undocumented workers (I am not being sarcastic here), and her warning that police-state tactics would be needed to enforce deportation, she still maintains: "I have been for border security for years. I voted for border security in the United States Senate. And my comprehensive immigration reform plan, of course includes border security." The continuity of proposal is not broken, only, as she notes, "I want to put our resources where I think they're most needed." Trump reminds her she voted for a wall, and her reply: "There are some limited places where that was appropriate. There also is necessarily going to be new technology and how to employ that." Clinton adds: "We will not have open borders. That is a rank mischaracterization. We will have secure borders. But we will also have reform." These are not sufficiently spelled out.

The discussion lingers. Wallace observes on open borders that in a speech Clinton "gave to a Brazilian bank for which you were paid \$225,000," you said, "My dream is a hemispheric common market with open trade and open borders," to which she made qualified replied, the reference was only to energy—a step back. But then she proceeded to an interesting segue (literally without interruption): "But you [to Wallace] are very clearly quoting from WikiLeaks. What is really important about WikiLeaks is that the Russian government has engaged in espionage against Americans." Clinton is wholly dismissive of WikiLeaks's accuracy, but more, its subversive role in US affairs.

Then, she engages, as she has done before, in red-baiting, connecting Trump with Putin, and by implication selling out American interests and demonstrating softness toward Russia: "They have hacked American websites, American accounts of private people, of institutions. Then they have

given that information to WikiLeaks for the purpose of putting it on the internet.” (WikiLeaks is somehow involved in the conspiracy with Russia to destroy the integrity of the American electoral system.) Then she continues: “This has come from the highest levels of the Russian government. Clearly from Putin himself in an effort, as 17 of our intelligence agencies have confirmed, to influence our election.” That isn’t enough. The noose of collaboration tightens: “So I actually think the most important question this evening, Chris, is finally, will Donald Trump admit and condemn that the Russians are doing this, and make it clear that he will not have the help of Putin in this election.” Joe McCarthy could not have said it better.

Further: “That he rejects Russian espionage against Americans, which he actually encouraged in the past. Those are the questions we need answered. We’ve never had anything like this happen in any of our elections before.” One is not persuaded by the confirmation of “17 of our intelligence agencies,” given their overriding mission to politicize intelligence for purposes of advancing the American national interest, concomitant with interfering in the elections of other nations, from foreign-aid assistance and joint treaties to dirty tricks and planned, often executed, coups. One can almost sympathize with Trump, did he not share the same argument, when he declares: “That was a great pivot off the fact that she wants open borders. Okay? How did we get on to Putin?”

That opens the way to an acerbic dialogue about the Cold War. Recently I had sought to discriminate between Trump and Clinton on the question of Russia, yet this difference is neither sufficient to disclaim their overall similarity on a broader geopolitical framework nor, here with Trump beginning to back down, his own proactive militancy in foreign policy. Neither candidate is above the use of force, both are profoundly committed to an America-first position and use of patriotism to silence opposition to US corporate privilege and supremacy in international affairs. Yet, politics is politics, and they seek a sliver of light to show who is fairest of them all. Trump: “She wants open borders. People are going to pour into our country....She wants 550% more people than Barack Obama.... [What threw me before again follows] Now we can talk about Putin. I don’t know Putin. He said nice things about me. If we got along well, that would be good. If Russia and the United States got along well and went after ISIS, that would be good.

He has no respect for her. He has no respect for our president.” Trump shares that sentiment. But then he enters deeper water: “We’re in very serious trouble. Because we have a country with tremendous nuclear warheads, 1,800, by the way. Where they expanded and we didn’t. 1,800 nuclear warheads. And she is playing chicken.” He apparently would not.

And Clinton: “Wait.” Trump: “Putin from everything I see has no respect for this person.” Clinton: “Well, that’s because he would rather have a puppet as president of the United States.” Trump: “No puppet. You’re the puppet.” That sets Clinton off in the validation of her Cold War, anti-Russian credentials: “It is pretty clear you won’t admit that the Russians have engaged in cyber attacks against the United States of America. That you encouraged espionage against our people. [She does all but call him a traitor] That you are willing to spout the Putin line, sign up for his wish list, break up NATO, do whatever he wants to do. And that you continue to get help from him because he has a very clear favorite in this race.... I find this deeply disturbing.” Clinton and Trump then go back and forth on alleged Russian hacking, she trotting out the 17 intelligence agencies, he, “Yeah, I doubt it, I doubt it.” Clinton: “He would rather believe Vladimir Putin than the military and intelligence professionals who are sworn to protect us. I find that just absolutely—“ Trump: “She doesn’t like Putin because Putin has outsmarted her at every step of the way.”

I dwell on the topic and the exchange to demonstrate Clinton's war-provoking perspective on foreign policy toward Russia. Yet on the hacking, under pressure from Wallace, Trump concedes his opposition to hacking, and in a mixed message shows ambivalence toward Russia: "I never met Putin. He is not my best friend. But if the United States got along with Russia, it wouldn't be so bad. Let me tell you, Putin has outsmarted her and Obama at every single step of the way." But "outsmarted" implies Putin cannot do that to him. On the missile treaty: "Take a look at the start-up that they signed. The Russians have said, according to many, many reports, I can't believe they allowed us to do this. They create warheads and we can't. The Russians can't believe it.... She has been outsmarted and outplayed worse than anybody I've ever seen in any government whatsoever." Clinton's response (they have drifted a long way from immigration): "I find it ironic that he is raising nuclear weapons. This is a person who has been very cavalier, even casual about the use of nuclear weapons." More bickering, she, "When the president gives the order, it must be followed," he, "I have 200 generals and admirals endorsing me, 21 congressional medal of honor recipients. As for Japan and other countries, we are being ripped off by everybody in the world." Trump's only complaint is it costs too much: "We are spending a fortune doing it. They have the bargain of the century."

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On the economy, the third topic, the usual disagreement over taxes and regulation occurs, lower (Republican) versus higher (Democratic), but capitalism in its monopolistic form is neither under consideration nor directly amenable to regulation. Clinton's Wall Street ties are ignored by her protestations: "Well, I think the middle class thrives, America thrives. So my plan is based on growing the economy giving middle class families many more opportunities." These include a jobs program, helping small business, and making "college debt-free and for families making less than \$125,000," free tuition from public colleges and universities. Less convincing, given her long-term record and more recent speaking fees, is her statement: "Most of the gains in the last years since the great recession have gone to the very top. So we are going to make the wealthy pay their fair share." Clinton calls Trump's plan, "trickle-down economics on steroids." Yes, excellent, but does hers promote the democratization of the political economy or merely attach a smattering of welfare capitalism onto a monopolistic, regulatory-favorable, trade-enhancing foundation?

Granted, differences exist within capitalism, but from the standpoint of domestic differentials of wealth and power, their plans, vision, execution (the latter, a predisposed government) closely align, Trump the more autarkic, nationalistic, Clinton, the more international, and perhaps sophisticated on matters of growth and expansion. Trump sounds like a cry-baby when it comes to taxation: "We will have a massive tax increase under Hillary Clinton's plan." He adds, "We're going to cut taxes massively. We're going to cut business taxes massively." Also, the protection afforded to Germany, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, will cost them, no more freebies. Too, the outsourcing of jobs would cease, or the products subject to heavy tariffs on their return to this country. The differences appear promising, except that only the strategies differ to the same end. Clinton: "I will not raise taxes on anyone making \$250,000 or less. I also will not add a penny to the debt. I have costed out what I'm going to do." It turns out her principal economic criticism of Trump involves an increased national debt, not the fate and the condition of the working class; balanced budgets would lead to greater employment, workers themselves stalled in place, prey to alienation and consumerism.

As in other areas, the bickering continues, economic growth founded on a trickle-down context for Trump, investing “from the middle out, and the ground up,” for Clinton, but always with job creation for both divorced from structural change and government-business interpenetration. From this point, the atmosphere becomes more charged, the candidates’ interactions ruder and more unpleasant, the positions themselves less fundamental still in details and consequences, Trump boastful about personal business success, Clinton, devotion to the underprivileged and the poor, and assertion and denial of Trump’s promiscuous sexual conduct. Rather than go on, because we have already blocked out areas of major concern, I should like to comment on the entire fiasco, disguising centrist fascism as democracy. Trump himself, on sexual groping, wanted desperately to cut matters short, or rather, drop all semblance of civility: “I believe, Chris, she [Clinton] got these people to step forward. If it wasn’t, they get their ten minutes of fame, but they were all totally—it was all fiction. It was lies and it was fiction.”

What is not fiction is the similitude of antidemocratic paradigms of governance. When one cuts through the seeming differences, from gay rights and abortion to the destruction of e-mails, the qualitative level of fruitful discussion and analysis should rest on the conservation of privilege in America, its institutional expression, abidance, furtherance, and intensification, and the political underpinnings on which it rests. Hierarchy, racism, the military cast of mind, all are the logical and necessary product of America’s pattern of capitalist development, in its purist formation perverse of class consciousness and dissent, and structurally intended to ensure unequal reward and the degradation of labor. In this light, the presidential contest and resulting election make perfect sense. At one point, Trump announces, fittingly: “We fought for the right in Palm Beach to put up the American flag.” It can be said, the same holds for Chappaqua.

Trump, by refusing here to accept the results of the election point blank, has infuriated the nation, including many of his supporters, if for no other reason than because he has exposed the fragility.

OCTOBER 6, 2016

### **Legacy: The Gift That Destroys America**

Thanks Dave Lindorff for “President Barack Obama’s Crappy Legacy,” CP, 10-5-16, an excellent overview of the devastation being left behind, on a whole range of problems, many of which have been self-created, by the outgoing Obama Administration. Before reading the article, I was contemplating a different tack, in which Obama was the mere expression, symbol, and exemplar of American policy over the long-term and America in general. Lindorff’s examples illustrate well where we’re presently at; my thinking is particularized around the contemporary meaning of fascism as applied to the United States, Obama a water boy—keeping the Nation /team supplied, not with water but the poisons of imperialism abroad, plutocracy at home, the connecting link political murder in all of its sordid manifestations, from drone assassination to intervention, confrontation, and regime change, and an intensified domestic structure and political economy of class-power and the reification of capitalistic wealth as a moral absolute.

Obama is not a causal force, but an easily replaceable object, the summation of a century-plus of societal development of capitalism-driven hegemony in world affairs—and before that, at least a half-century of industrial-financial concentration to lay the foundation for, and make practicable,

the quest for unilateral global dominance. There is nothing innocent about how America assumed the historical direction it has taken. One might almost go back to John Locke himself to get a sense of the political-philosophic underpinnings for a social order identified so narrowly with individualism and self-enrichment devoid of collective obligation as to produce glaring differences in wealth, power, status by whatever it takes, including racial immiseration as a subchapter of the larger condition of labor exploitation.

America, at least since 1800, has been founded on the destruction of community (the Alien and Sedition Acts a harbinger of things to come), which is to say, with Locke, that capitalism would have a clear field for advancement and for taking on a purist complexion where property rules supreme. Repression is in America's DNA: Shooting down workers in the Great Railway Strikes of 1877 or the Bonus Marchers under Hoover are not random incidents; still less, the sustained pattern of underconsumption to keep a laboring people docile in pursuit of their class interests. In this general setting, domestic and foreign policy cannot be separated, are indivisible, with market penetration the "soft" side of imperialism (as opposed to armed intervention) while building up surplus value for the giant corporations. In the well-oiled machine of capitalism, little is left to chance—and without positing conspiracy theory, one can see how Obama, like either of his successors, Trump or Clinton, makes perfectly good sense, the historical-structural-ideological logic of the situation.

The historical boundaries of America are progressively narrowing; through concerted effort, radicalism is drying up, a broadly Left alternative seemingly out of reach. Yet, I say "seemingly," because knowing the score does not mean people have to succumb to it. The more one comes to realize the looming fascistic proportions of the society, the more incentive to fight back, not alone, which is futile, but through building a potential mass of disaffection, drawing upon a not-negligible heritage of freedom also in America's past. Consensus is an overrated thesis in taking account of the relative lack of social protest, the sameness in the political choices offered, the proneness to militarism saturating the popular culture. The Emperor (Obama) wears no clothes; he is an utter fake, worse, a traitor to the cause of people's government. That he is black is only the latest mystification surrounding the dynamics of power. If I were Dr. King or Paul Robeson I would shutter in my grave at the betrayal of social purpose, the promise of what could have been, the opportunity offered, by his election.

On every front—war, the environment, race, corporate regulation, income distribution, etc.—America is falling back, hardening in attitude, callous of all others standing in the way of omnipotence, callous of those within, who are suffering and/or have the temerity to call for increased democratization as the path to wholeness and averting catastrophe. Legacy? It is that of being on the edge and looking into the abyss of totalitarian self-encirclement having the potential of bringing the world down if the clear field for hegemony is not opened. Obama can be rated a good enough field general in preserving the work of his predecessors, immediate and distant, the work of counterrevolution in warding off rising aspirations in the Third World while maintaining a Pax Americana to supervise and be the chief beneficiary of a globalization process inimical to socialism and productive of a two-tiered international framework of advancement and retrogradation, exclusively within a capitalist orbit.

I, for one, shall not be sorry to see him leave the presidency, knowing full well that his successor and those to come after will not be any better.

OCTOBER 7, 2016

## **Civil Disobedience: Dr. King, America Needs You Now**

At this moment, I vividly recall gathered at Brown's Church, days before the Great March at Selma, Dr. King officiating at a memorial service for the Rev. Jim Reeb, murdered the night before on the streets of Selma. We stood, clasped arms, swayed back and forth in alternate rows, singing, "Selma needs you Lord, kumbaya, Selma needs you Lord, kumaya." This is now just such a time. America needs you Lord, kumbaya. But where are the leaders to urge us on, to declare the State a militarized tyranny, to say, in simple, straightforward terms, NO, to the growing police state within, its direct complement and counterpart without, an hubristic loner in the world community unwilling to settle for anything less than global domination in all its aspects, military, political, ideological, etc.?

To be in the eye of the storm (my reference, not to Matthew) is to miss what is swirling about, perhaps rotating faster than the eye can see, the mind can grasp. But America, whether under liberalism or conservatism (both having to all intents merged as a unified expression of incipient fascism), has trespassed the bounds of international law, human decency, and, specifically at home, a moral social order which condemns militarism, violence, and not least, the growing inequality rooted in the functions, operations, and spirit of capitalism as practiced in America.

Dr. King, already implicit in the March on Washington (I recall the placards about Jobs and Freedom carried by UAW members—where are they, and labor in general, now?), had the vision of the Poor People's Campaign, which made ruling-group behavior and gross disparities in wealth and income moral issues. That is as it should be, just as today, all things hegemonic (and there are many, compressed into the symbol of armed drones for targeted assassination—the logical next step after the Nazi V-2 campaign over London), are, foremost, moral issues which by rights should condemn America in the eyes of humankind. The current presidential campaign tells us as much, rotten-to-the-core candidates unable to differentiate between construction and destruction, the latter a sign of national virility and leverage for forcing the respect of others.

Normality is anything but normal; it is the warped perspective of conquest. If one-half of the government's discretionary income is devoted to the military, what does this tell us about peaceful intent, democracy, respect for human rights, a system of laws designed to protect the weak from abuse? These are all repudiated in practice day-to-day with capitalism's mержence with the State into an integrated power system skewed in favor of wealth, influence, and, for justification, an exaggerated, brittle, class-defined ultra-patriotism. The football stadium is built on top of the nuclear stockpile, eliciting hosannas for aggression, crushing the Enemy, implied by both. (The politicization of sport is one way of inducing support for the Big Kill, and a life of conformity cheering the verities on cue.)

Can civil disobedience stand up to a social system and the generation of suitable, appropriate, consistent leadership predicated on force? Courage is in short supply in 21st century America. And courage divorced from solidarity is even more at a disadvantage. Everything about the country points to fragmentation (e.g., the selfie-craze in photos, a self-enclosing personalism which teaches self-importance over community to a society fearful of collective identities and institutions that might question unlimited wealth accumulation and invidious status rankings), so that individualism becomes a reversion to social Darwinism's affirmation of dog-eat-dog ethics. Dr. King preached

love. Ethnocentrism, xenophobia, torture, brutality, these are the enemies of love, yet rife, indeed, glorified, in our midst. The moral contamination is spreading, almost reaching surge-proportions, closing off the political system, as presently found, to any truthful, trustworthy expression of democratic government. Clinton / Trump, choose your poison. Too, the economic system is closing off, the capacious umbrella of privatization enforcing the growth of massive wealth, including the reshaping of capitalism in America from a mixed industrial-financial system to one narrowly geared to financialization and the distortions thereby produced. (Little else is produced, production as such no longer the system's reason for being.)

It is no coincidence that Dr. King has no present-day replacement, just as it is no coincidence that he was assassinated in the first place, given the alignment of historical forces edging the nation toward a stage of social-economic regimentation which finds even professions of equality and justice suspect, if not intolerable—particularly in foreign policy, where anything goes thought to be to America's benefit. Rest in peace, Dr. King. Your soul should not have to be burdened with aircraft carrier battle groups pressing on China, NATO forces similarly in battle formation on the Russian borders, negotiated joint military alliances worldwide, the list near-infinitely extensible under whichever party and president in power. We who cherish your memory and what you stand for (past-tense "stood" too limiting) are still groping in the dark for want of purchase on a steep vertical cliff face with those at the top (literally) heaving boulders over the side to knock us down. American democracy is in Sisyphus-mode.

Yet, why despair? Why let the bast— get the better of us, reduce us to their level of hate, criminality, sordidness? Trump / Clinton are lightweights, compared with the noxious liberalism of Obama, a liberalism indistinguishable from the Cold War it has fostered for 2/3 of a century, most of that time impugning the integrity, and demeaning the condition, of working people, while turning somersaults for the pleasure of the wealthy. Verily, we have a class-state that Dr. King all-too-well recognized, but whose life was cut short before he was able to mount an opposition to it. Can this generation carry on his work ... before it is too late?

OCTOBER 10, 2016

### **The Slippery Slope: Rolling Downward, No Brakes, Nuclear War**

Policy is not a discrete entity; indeed, instead, it is a cumulative force, broadening in scope and direction, as it—in this case—plunges toward self- and global-annihilation. Destruction is in the very air we breathe, as though Thanatos looming overhead, because exceptionalism is reaching a point of satiety and feelings of emptiness and alienation make other than war and dominance meaningless. Militarism gnaws at the vitals of democracy. The world knows it about America; we do not. In false modesty, we are God's chosen people of liberal humanitarianism, a.k.a., the seat of wealth and power locking world capitalism into ideological place, with special rewards and advantages for, putatively, being good global citizens. Hypocrisy knows no bounds in the eyes of the assassin (as in armed drones targeted for that purpose) and unilateral claimants of moral authority.

America was not always thus. Its mixed history contained, even under conditions of severe repression, as in plantation slavery and the struggles of industrial labor, fighting back with no little idealism against socioeconomic and structural forces of evil. Domination has, perhaps until now,



never been a one-way street, even though a thirst for freedom has stopped at the water's edge (except for what I see as the necessity of World War II and, to a lesser extent, World War I, the latter nonetheless for the worse because of Wilson's hegemonic vision). In foreign policy, in general, nowhere more than now, there is an unrelenting thrust to assert force and confrontation into international politics, with unavoidable consequences for the abridgment of freedom at home. The nation is only as good as, and must be judged by, what it does overseas.

Reciprocally, what it does at home contributes directly to the nation's goals and parameters in foreign policy, the road from police state to garrison state, in neither, totally consummated, but the tendencies in both are becoming daily more evident. Through it all, capitalism, sails flying, has safe passage as the social wealth of America becomes increasingly divorced from the needs, health, and well-being of the people and subject to accumulation and consolidation into fewer hands and deeper pockets. Monopolism above, socially-induced paralysis of will below, makes for the illegitimacy of rulership when the State serves its upper groups, chiefly, its economic and military elites, to the exclusion of all else.

A class-state cannot remain static. Capital accumulation, particularly through the assistance (connivance?) of government, is self-reinforcing, until capitalism itself exhausts opportunities for further enrichment when, saturated, played out, the process is renewed again, at each stage structurally breeding more inequality, more control over government, more intolerance of opposition, more determination, more rigidification, when it comes to the deeper gradations in disparities of power in society. Capitalism is antidemocracy in spirit and practice; no wonder the importance of the military factor in its history and development since at least 1900. For America, foreign markets, as though to export surpluses which might otherwise lower price levels at home, in addition to the generous profit margins often afforded in overseas trade, are peculiarly important in capitalist development, and as such, they require constant pressures, interventionist, military and otherwise, in securing political and commercial benefits.

Likes partake of each other's features: capitalism = antidemocracy = hierarchical, systemic inequality = militarism/expansion as the singular mode of achievement for the former. One senses here the internal motion, the dynamism of repressive economic features, of what is, paradoxically, capitalistic stasis (a state of static balance or equilibrium—Webster's, but hardly meant to apply to capitalism). The more capitalism advances in form, complexity, onerousness, the more it stays the same. Thus we come, then, to the slippery slope, capitalism's downward progression (from the standpoint of structurally-inscribed equalitarianism, rule of law, and human rights), with, the momentum underway, no brakes to check its progression. At some point, currently approaching, nihilism characterizes the modal response of policy makers, and nuclear war, whether limited or full-scale, becomes thinkable, if not already being entertained.

Rolling downward. America is tilting dangerously toward fascism. Societal bonds of moral obligation to humankind, the environment, Nature in all its splendor, the historical past and future, no longer or barely exists as a defining trait of American political culture, the display and discussion of democratic values notwithstanding. The pantheon of law-making is just that (a temple dedicated to the gods, in this case, those of wealth, power, and status), wholly removed from the people in their just demands and everyday needs. For America, all three branches of government seem color coordinated (red, white, blue) in their uniform endeavor on behalf of capitalist stabilization and the status quo in class and race relations. Some tugging and hauling exists, but

within predefined limits that reinforce the fundamental pattern of order, deference, the individual's self-pacification. There is no need for rage, when each has a place in the folk community of exceptionalism and capitalism.

The downward systemic progression has nothing of the teleological (design or purpose in nature) about it. It is a product of policy, turning the screws on working people and the poor, and as such, reveals its class origins, whether the skillful manipulation of banking, tariff, and tax policies, the sweetheart relation of government and media for promoting indoctrination and official truths, or the internal espionage of massive surveillance. All have as their purpose the twin-fold societal desiderata (as defined by themselves) of bestowing on elite groups the free hand for maximizing profit and privilege simultaneous with curbing social protest in case of a rise in popular awareness of the wealth-siphoning practices ideologically and every which way used against the people. As of now, this paradigm of exploitation and personal enrichment seems to be working quite well.

No brakes. Within the structure and ethics of capitalism, there are no checks on this downward progression, only its own apparent contradictions, which, in any case, do not result in obstacles to wealth-gathering and –accumulation. Stinting oneself of gain is so foreign to the individual's values and personal make-up as to permeate the mindset of the total society, which renders the working poor hostage to the social mythology presented down-the-line as ideological bait to ensure acquiescence. When a system of political economy has no checks on its immanent (here, inherent) tendencies, expect the worst—a grotesqueness and intensification of its viral (causative) attributes: war, alienation, underconsumption, a sizable differentiation of wealth and power among its people, in the case of capitalism, and more so America, in the world its purist expression.

Which leads to the third point, the potential for nuclear war. I see only America and Israel as prime instigators of such an eventuality—and hopefully, not even them. Russia and China give no indication on those lines. The problem is, one of desperation, should America see its world standing seriously diminished or undermined, increasingly likely as the international structure becomes decentralized through the rise of new centers of power. China will not go away, nor will a whole host of countries, beginning with Russia, but also, in financial-industrial terms, Japan, India, the list grows as America weakens (in all but financial schematics, more grounded in speculation than in production). Yet not economic performance that may be determinative, but ideological mindset, in facing the prospects of nuclear war. Americans have become jaded to an unbelievable extent, a dulling of political sensibility nowhere better seen than in the current election campaign, so that not even desperation takes on a hard edge, again, the slippery slope alluded to, where it becomes possible to drift into an anomic (lack of purpose or ideals) state, devil-may-care, actually welcoming self- and social-destruction.

If this state of mind persists, all the markets in the world, the unearned profits of deal-making and gunboat diplomacy, pride of ownership and the ability to press down others, will not do to feed the colossal appetite of America. Then?

OCTOBER 11, 2016

## **Indictment: US Guilty of War Crimes**

I am sickened as I write, my country, engaged in horrible crimes against human beings, tortured, reduced to helplessness, imprisoned for years, often released subsequently without charges ... a compliant (and complicit) public, ranging from profound denial to blissful unconcern or the self-righteous expression of justifiability, forming the silent background for a tableau of dishonor and extreme cruelty. I refer to Guantanamo, but also CIA black sites scattered worldwide, sadistic personnel—jailers, physicians, psychologists and psychiatrists, lawyers, military and intelligence officers, members of Congress, Washington, America in general, right up to Obama—compliant, complicit, no, actively supportive, blood-soaked in mind and spirit, positively relishing the demonic practices, all in the name of freedom and democracy, the American Way of Life, God Himself/Herself.

I have criticized the New York Times often enough in these pages. That does not change, in most things a direct pipeline from, or reflecting the views of, the Administration; but this time, the article, “How U.S. Torture Left Legacy of Damaged Minds,” (Oct. 9), by Matt Apuzzo, Sheri Fink, and James Risen, has done the paper proud, with excellent research (as much as classification-in-place has allowed) on the details of torture, medical reports, etc., as well as legwork and photographs of former prisoners, and interviews of what detainees were subjected to and their current psychological and physical problems, heightening the impact and truth value of the report. The focus is on the aftereffects, but much is brought out about the actual torture—clearly, standard operating procedure, partly to break the will of the prisoners, partly, pure viciousness on the part of the captors—of those imprisoned.

I quote and paraphrase liberally from the report, in grateful acknowledgment of the reporters’ work. (My commentary and responses are my own.) They write that “government lawyers and intelligence officials” concluded that “none of it [torture] ... would cause long lasting psychological harm,” and, [f]ifteen years later, it is clear they were wrong.” (Like Kafka, I will identify the victims serially by an initial.) A. “describes permanent headaches and disturbed sleep, plagued by memories of dogs inside a blackened jail”; B. “is haunted by nightmares of suffocating at the bottom of a well”; C. music from a passing car “spurs rage ... reminding him of the C.i.A. prison where earsplitting music was just one assault to his senses.” So much for their alleged absence of psychological damage, years after having been released from incarceration.

The reporters speak of detainees “enduring agonizing treatment in secret C. I. A. prisons around the world or coercive practices at the military detention camp at Guantanamo Bay,” similar to what American P.O.W.’s faced “who were brutalized decades earlier by some of the world’s cruelest regimes.” Some of those [it seems a majority from the evidence presented] of those now discussed “included victims of mistaken identity or flimsy evidence that the United States later disavowed,” or were “foot soldiers ... who were later deemed to pose little threat.” “[T]he human toll,” the reporters note, “has gone largely uncalculated.”

Of those interviewed, more than half going through the C.I.A. “‘enhanced interrogation’ program” had a regimen which included “depriving them of sleep, dousing them with ice water, slamming them into walls and locking them in coffin-like boxes,” not surprisingly since showing “psychiatric problems,” e.g., PTSD, “paranoia, depression or psychosis.” In others, “the military

inflicted sensory deprivation, isolation, menacing with dogs,” etc. The government never studied the long-term effects of the torture. Even during medical treatment at Guantanamo, physicians “did not ask their patients what had happened during their questioning”—profound denial all up and down the line. And when “released from American custody, some found neither help nor relief.” They had been “snatched, interrogated and imprisoned, then sent home without explanation.”

The widow of D., who had died in May, states, “He was humiliated, and that feeling never went away.” Then there was E., a 15-year-old child soldier, captured in Afghanistan, a Canadian, who, after years of imprisonment, related to his lawyer that “the American soldiers had kept him from sleeping, spit in his face and threatened him with rape[.]” In anxiety attacks he once urinated during interrogation “and soldiers had dragged him through the mess.” He said: “This is the room where they used me as a human mop.” One conscientious examining physician noted that E. had PTSD, “a conclusion the military contested.” The doctor later did research “on the effects of abusive practices,” and “found decades of papers on the issue” going back to World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, in which “[f]ormer soldiers who suffered torture or mistreatment were more likely than others to develop long-term problems.” Government’s response to such an obvious conclusion? Have a training program, SERE [Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape] “to resist enemy interrogators”!

Enter the psychologists, essentially to toughen up service members so they can withstand torture, professionals—in practices which the American Psychological Association has not condemned—who “gave electric shocks to dogs” as part of the experiments in developing a resistance-strategy. (The dogs were strays, then euthanized, indicative of the cynicism of all those joining in the detainee enterprise.) F. provided “the grisly details” of “water dousing,” in which he was “forced onto a plastic tarp while naked, his hands shackled above his head. Sometimes he was hooded. One C.I.A. official poured buckets of ice water on him as others lifted the tarp’s covers, sending water splashing over him and causing a choking or drowning sensation. He said he endured the treatment multiple times.”

Exceptionalism? America the Beautiful? Other techniques included “mock executions, threats to harm prisoners’ children or rape their family members, and ‘rectal feeding,’ which involved inserting liquid food supplements or puree into the rectum.” For those moving through C.I.A. jails, “interrogations were designed to disrupt the senses and increase helplessness..... Forced nudity, sensory deprivation and endless light or darkness were considered routine.” The reporters further observed, “Many of those men [from C.I.A. jails] were later released without charges, unsure of why they were held.” Senate investigators concluded, “About one in four prisoners should never have been captured, or turned out to have been misidentified by the C.I.A.” I suspect the proportion was greater.

Finally, let me look at F., “a Moroccan living in Afghanistan in 2001, [who] was held for years as a suspected member of a group linked to Al Qaeda. He said he was beaten repeatedly at a United States military jail in Kandahar and forced to watch soldiers do the same to his younger brother.” The sect he belonged to was actually “oppressed by Al Qaeda and others.” He was kept in isolation at Guantanamo, where, protesting his innocence, he was threatened, abused, shown “execution photos,” and told he would be sent to Morocco for further torture. The denouement: “After he was released last year, the United States gave him a letter saying it no longer stood by information that he was a member of a Qaeda-linked group in Morocco. Despite diplomatic assurances that he would

face no charges, Morocco jailed him for several months late last year and he continues to fight allegations that he thought were behind him.” Now, he is under psychiatric care and has serious, painful symptoms.

I give F. the last word: ““They [his doctors] tell me everything is normal. Your brain is playing games. It is something mental. You’re still living in Gitmo. It’s fear.” There is more to be said, more case studies, an indictment, whether NYT’s intent (but the evidence is there) written in the blood, nervous systems, minds of the victims. The US plays hard ball. There appears to be no resting, either political party, the public at large, and when not directly implicated America has cultivated proxies worldwide to do its mission. What that mission is, I leave the reader to determine.

OCTOBER 12, 2016

### **Let’s Boogie-Woogie: Trump’s Propulsive Libido**

[Boogie-Woogie: “a percussive style of playing blues on the piano characterized by a steady rhythmic ground bass of eighth notes in quadruple time and a series of improvised melodic variations”—Webster’s. Political translation: pound away with just enough cacophony to avoid boredom whilst spreading the message of capitalism, militarism, war, privilege, hierarchy, in sum, the fascistization of the American polity. Improvise the message with stirrings of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and contempt for dissent and human rights, disguised with the steady beat of liberalism and patriotism, so as to appear the voice of American Exceptionalism. No, not my beloved Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, and Meade Lux Lewis, whose eight-to-the bar piano trios sing out for emancipation—the affirmation of race, dignity, social conscience—from regimentation and second-class citizenship, but Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, their followers, America itself, who themselves transmogrify the beauties of human freedom into the hegemonic thirst/quest of oppressing the world community and the less fortunate within our society for the sake of domination, riches, status, pure and simple. Like Ravel’s *La Valse*, their boogie-woogie careens out of control, spiraling into a vortex of Evil, never sated, always seeking more power, more avenues of subjugation, the rat running in circles trying to catch his/her tail.]

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I Background. My focus here is on Trump, the glamor of easygoing fascism, sitting poolside, self-assured, sexually obsessive, morbidly accumulative, precisely one whose infantilism translates into statesmanship and deal-making, the two indistinguishable, similar to the arrogance he adopts in his approach to women (age, thirty-five and under). Hail fellow, one of the boys, what’s not to like? To answer, let’s go back a step. The brouhaha surrounding revelations of Trump’s sexism (and worse) is phony, self-serving, righteousness in the service of denial and suppression. Trump is America, and he has run afoul of its feigned prudery, which covers over its secret yearnings for everything he has done and represents. If the lid were taken off, groping would be a national pastime, but the lid—a stabilized capitalism founded on Order in its myriad guises—cannot be removed lest social discipline, as in showing deference to wealth and the wealthy, with an admixture of worship of military prestige, is diminished, and all manner of libidinal energies spill out.

America is tightly-bound in its own hypocrisy. Our novelist laureate should be Nathaniel Hawthorne, who long ago recognized the closure of the social order, in which Hester Prynne becomes the martyr-hero to America's distorted sensibility. She wore the letter "A" which could be a stand-in for the whole alphabet of neurotic fears that plagued and still plague the society, from radicalism and socialism to a common acceptance of difference and diversity. Here, Trump, unlike Clinton, is actually a breath of fresh air: unvarnished libido (primitive biological urges often goal-directed, or simply, sexual energy), which, in valuing self-indulgent pleasures might conceivably make him hesitant about blowing up the world, a potential reticence entirely foreign to Clinton's mega-belligerence and stored-up resentments. The comparison brings to mind Nietzsche, who, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, argued that it was precisely like what we see as the composite personality of Clinton, meanness, weakness, duplicitous, craving, and snuggling up to, power, mendacious, all summarized in the email controversy and her enabling of Bill in his affairs (while demonizing his paramours), which provided the context and personality structure of one who strikes out in vengeance at Enemies real and imagined. The strong are not so prompted; it is the weak who spew poisons at humankind.

A veiled endorsement, on my part, of Trump? Of course not. His underlying weakness is of another kind, the bully overcompensating for his barrenness as a human being. Yet with Trump, again unlike Clinton, the active nature of the Freudian pleasure principle is a check on wholesale destruction, including that of himself. The Trump-Putin connection, though hardly ratified, is not far-fetched in fact and conception. Trump endorses waterboarding, which per se puts him beyond the pale, outside the human community, still, however, less bathed in venom than Clinton, who gives every indication of wanting to stab Putin in the back, and also Xi for good measure. With Trump there is hope of avoiding nuclear war (a Trump Palace in Macau or Beijing would not, for him, be idle speculation); in Clinton's case, an ideologically-driven agenda makes anything possible.

Trump is no Nietzsche, Clinton no Hester (her quiet dignity and authentic heroic proportions), both instead crude symbols of American greed, whether of power, wealth, or the combination of the two. Even uglier, from the standpoint of a depraved mental-set, is the Republican (to the Democrats' enjoyment) growing disavowal of Trump. He at least is all surface, his lack of inhibitions tantamount to opening the safety-valve of resentments, the *joie de vivre* standing in marked contrast to the suspicious, censorious mind-set of his critics who dwell in a bottomless well of self-righteous negativity, hissing curses at those not thought to measure up: immigrants, the laboring poor, advocates for the democratization of power, minorities who are not given to self-debasement, those who reject militarism and the Cold War—with enough shared feeling in the other major party to define the national political ethos and mood. As fascistically-inclined as Trump is, America matches him stride for stride, with Clinton, beacon in hand, showing the way.

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II The Debate and Its Aftermath. From the outset, the debate proved a nonstarter, not the questions, discourtesies of the candidates to each other, their facial expressions, charges and innuendoes of presidential unfitness, but the actual substance of their views, dead giveaways of an authoritarian position, of each, within the narrow compass of militarism and corporatism. Capitalist hegemony, suitably confrontational with Russia (China, not prominently featured), becomes the guiding principle of American governance in the achievement of world order and, of course,

domestic business-banking regulatory structure. Personalities aside and their mutual hostility, their tricks and debating strategems, one finds, in all the posturing, a narrow band of ideological sameness, the arrogance of power reduced to two players in the same dark policy closet.

Even the first question (from the audience) elicited a response on the politicization of systemic virtue. Clinton [“on modeling appropriate and positive behavior for today’s youth”]: “...our country really is great because we’re good.” Trump’s mantra, ditto: “This is a great country.... [M]y whole concept was to make America great again.” If there is any doubt about the premise of exceptionalism and its widespread acceptance, it should be put to rest: Whatever America does is right, and neither candidate seeks to dismantle class-structure (hierarchical framework of concentrated power in upper groups) or renounce imperialism, ranging from intervention and regime change to market penetration and natural-resources extraction. Both candidates take for granted America’s unilaterally presiding over a process of global dominance supported through superior military means, including the modernization of nuclear weaponry.

There is no dissenting voice on essentials, nor the proposal of alternative strategies of domestic growth and foreign expansion. Notwithstanding rhetoric, there seems little reason for having two separate major parties. In fact, we are scraping bottom as sex—here for both an avoidance of articulating and discussing consequential societal policy and planning—takes over. Trump’s defense of engaging only in “locker room talk,” while Bill Clinton not only talked but acted, and Clinton’s emphasis on the sexual fantasies, groping, etc. of Trump, I’m tempted to say, appears as the sexualization of fascism via the trivialization and obfuscation of the electoral process.

Trump’s stock answer to Cooper, who, along with Raddatz, moderated the “debate,” on his groping and kissing women: “No, I have not. And I tell you [master of changing the subject] that I’m going to make our country safe. We’re going to have borders in our country, which we don’t have now.... We’re going to make America safe again. We’re going to make America great again, but we’re going to make America safe again.” It is as though Trump were combining anti-immigrant feeling with a generalized notion of “mak[ing] America safe,” through repetition conjuring up racist doctrine and perhaps an inclusive attack on what he perceives to be radical-ism. Clinton, not to be undone, quietly fuses the political and military dimensions of office: “I said starting back in June that he was not fit to be president and commander-in-chief,” the latter, in a presidential campaign, raised to the dignity of the former. She goes further by attaching antifeminism to her critique: “What we all saw and heard on Friday [the release of the video] was Donald talking about women, what he thinks about women, what he does to women.”

And this is still the beginning. Clinton, borrowing a talking point from Obama, continues: “So this is who Donald Trump is. And the question for us, the question our country must answer is that this is not who we are.” The problem is, it is who we are. Trump’s unwanted advances on, and to, women cannot compare with established policy, formulated and subscribed to, by Obama and the government, a structural-ideological cynicism favoring death and destruction, executed routinely on a daily basis. Lechery finds a home in national debauchery, particularly when the nation and its political leadership (on a bipartisan basis) claims ignorance and/or deniability for the promiscuous murder of others routinely labeled adversaries—a prioritizing of sin in which Authority is exempted and given a free pass. What is alarming here is less Trump’s personal conduct than the barrage of opposition (the aftermath, within his own party), which neglects the claimed-legitimacy of political murder and, doing so, risks wider war and untold misery and carnage. Trump’s sole redeeming

feature is that he smokes out the same callous sense of impunity in conduct that one finds in himself; he is a miniature America.

He also, to his credit, without altering his own fascistic-inclined take on policy, is to see through Clinton. When she speaks about the goodness of America and the celebration of diversity, Trump replies, “It’s just words, folks,” and goes on to list the many promises in policy-areas left unfulfilled when, in office, she had the chance to act. Then, after give-and-take on the Trump tapes (earlier, with Howard Stern) and more about the video, he goes on the offensive: “...when Hillary brings up a point like that [the Stern tapes] and she talks about words that I said 11 years ago, I think it’s disgraceful, and I think she should be ashamed of herself, if you want to know the truth.” Clinton, of course, answers in kind: “...he gets to run his campaign any way he chooses. He gets to decide what he wants to talk about.” Additional contretemps shed little further light (Trump threatens a special prosecutor and refers to the deletion of 33,000 e-mails, while Clinton calls for more fact-checking to show Trump up), until, far along, there is discussion of the Affordable Care Act, with neither candidate seeking genuine changes in line with a single-payer system (although Trump mistakenly credits Clinton with favoring such a system).

But what I find interesting are the references to Putin and Russia, in which Clinton takes us back to the red-baiting of the 1950s. First, she charges Russia with aggression in Syria: “...think of that picture we all saw of that 4-year-old boy with the blood on his forehead because he had been bombed by the Russian and Syrian air forces.” Nominally, the point is made in connection with admitting more Syrian refugees into the United States, but, because she refuses to analyze the complexion of the rebels which she and America support against Assad, it appears the basic point is to build antagonism toward Russia: “There are children suffering in this catastrophic war, largely, I believe, because of Russian aggression.”

Clinton then links Russia up, through several steps, with Trump’s campaign: “...our intelligence community just came out and said in the last few days that the Kremlin [code, I think, for a not to subtle reference to present-day Stalinism], meaning Putin and the Russian government, are directing the attacks, the hacking on American accounts to influence our election.... We have never in the history of our country been in a situation where an adversary, a foreign power, is working so hard to influence the outcome of the election. And believe me, they’re not doing it to get me elected. They’re doing it to try to influence the election for Donald Trump.”

Here paranoia meets opportunism, and Trump rightly comes back with a declaration that may actually hold out the promise of greater peace (a salient difference between the candidates, even if Trump’s concern is sophisticated capitalism and war destructive to that end): “...I don’t know Putin. I think it would be great if we got along with Russia because we could fight ISIS together, as an example. But I don’t know Putin.” This is not a slip; he elaborates further: “But I notice, anytime anything wrong happens, they [Clinton and Democrats] like to say the Russians are—she doesn’t know if it’s the Russians doing the hacking. Maybe there is no hacking. But they always blame Russia.” Finally, he adds: “And the reason they blame Russia [is] because they think they’re trying to tarnish me with Russia. I know nothing about Russia. I know—I know about Russia, but I know nothing about the inner workings of Russia. I don’t deal there. I have no businesses there. I have no loans from Russia.” Possibly he someday envisions a Trump Tower in Red Square, but I doubt that, or rather, see it as far less dangerous to world security and the fate of the planet than Clinton’s open characterization (see above) of Russia as an adversary.



The rest I leave for the reader to discover. As for aftermath, the glee within his own party to write him off as the presidential candidate may have for its explanation, not Trump's outsized sexual ideas and conduct, but his refusal to join the anti-Russia chorus and attendant fear that he would not disfavor global accommodation. One never knows—but with Clinton a spirit of confrontation abroad, Wall Street uber alles at home, seems the path to election and comports with her personal convictions on political economy, ideology, and foreign policy. She, with the full consent and endorsement of the Democratic party, is in the forefront of military action, here: "I would go after Baghdadi. I would specifically target Baghdadi, because I think our targeting of Al Qaida leaders—and I was involved in a lot of those operations, highly classified ones—made a difference. So I think that could help." She would go further: "I would also consider arming the Kurds." On and on the march of progress. One has the sinking feeling, I have said this before, that neither candidate deserves attention and support, that America is operating in crisis mode, that the future looks grim, internally, and because of that, externally.

OCTOBER 14, 2016

### **Artificial Creation: Released Emails on Clinton**

Chozick and Confessore's article in NYT (Oct. 10), "Hillary Clinton's Campaign Strained to Hone Her Message, Hacked Emails Show," provides an initial overview of just-released documents by WikiLeaks (readers are invited to return to the full transcript, see my excerpts on Wall Street below) damning in their indictment of Clinton's manicured campaign pored over by numerous advisers and consultants to achieve a nuanced effect of Reaction if not borderline fascism partly restrained or disguised through carefully prepared liberal rhetoric. Hillary, the billboard figure, is an empty receptacle, bending with the political wind (when absolutely necessary). Nonetheless she has a backbone of entrenched conservatism, militaristic belligerence, opportunism, suitable for presentation to an advanced capitalist society used to prevarication in the service of expansion, confrontation, and a closely stratified class system centered on global hegemony and domestic order. How does this differ from Trump, aside from style and tone? My thought is, very little. In substance and ideology, the two major parties, as tested by their foreign policies and accommodation (aka, strong support) of business, finance, and generalized corporatism symbolized by Wall Street, and their candidates, are essentially one.

The emails, the reporters note, "show a candidacy that began expecting a coronation and was thrown badly off course by a misreading of the electorate and a struggle to define what she stood for." So much for integrity and independent judgment. The correspondence, covering a nine-year period (mine: important that shows the ambitiousness, the years of preparation and grooming, etc.) "captures in detail the campaign's extreme caution and difficulty in identifying a core rationale for her candidacy, and the noisy world of advisers, friends and family members trying to exert influence." To paraphrase Pirandello, here is one character in search of power.

Even jokes at Iowa dinners were scrutinized and monitored. Denying her interest in running, Clinton assembled a staff "to wrestle with how to reposition a career politician [which she was and is, thank you Chozick and Confessore for reminding us] as an agent of change and how openly to rely on gender to stoke grass-roots enthusiasm." One aide in 2014 suggested the campaign motto: "Neither change nor continuity but the different way. The new way. She champions with clear

vision and grit. We will not build the partisan ships. But rather the Ship of State flying the American Dream flag.” Whether or not employed, it reveals the artificiality and cynicism of the build-up, with “grit” one of my favorite designators, given her pride with military brass in proving herself one of the boys.

Crafted imagery, even what to say about gray hair, Palmieri, one of her advisers, saying: “More humor, first woman, ass kicker and coloring her hair.” Be all things to everyone. The reporters make an astute point: “Almost all campaigns calibrate stage craft, speeches and strategy. But the new emails seem to underscore Mrs. Clinton’s public struggles in defining her politics and her reasons for wanting to become president.” The discussions with aides “often revolved around the political advantages and pitfalls of different positions,” with little attention to what she may or may not have believed. The team “seemed consumed with positioning and optics.” What then can be said about regulation and peace, where her actions contradicted her public statements? Is there anything one can bank on—why I emphasize ambition, prevarication, and opportunism. (At least with Trump, you know what you are getting, not a composite image provided by a legion of others. Two markedly different paths to the same destination, with neither path particularly conducive to democracy and human rights.)

A case in point, 2015, is what public stand to take on Wall Street. “Her senior advisers agonized over whether she should address calls to reinstate Glass Steagall [the separation of commercial and investment banking],” another adviser, Grunwald, feared that unless Clinton endorsed it she would lose the support of Elizabeth Warren: “I understand that we face phoniness charges if we ‘change’ our position now—but we face political risks too. I worry about Elizabeth deciding to endorse Bernie [Sanders].” Clinton typically ran around end, holding that there are other ways to regulate Wall Street. On criticizing Sanders, on adopting a position about gay rights, on the private email accounts while serving as Secretary of State, Clinton and her aides went back and forth canvassing every aspect affecting her position and reputation. Even on the emails, she had high-powered consul changing “hand over” to “turn over” documents as being less pejorative. The Clinton Foundation was also a thorn in the side in how to present its role.

From the Independent, Rachael Revesz reporting (Oct. 11), we learn that Goldman Sachs paid Clinton \$675,000 for speeches, and, after leaving State, she received \$3M from delivering speeches on the financial circuit. For Goldman she suggested that “Wall Street insiders are what is needed to fix Wall Street.” The speech in 2013 asserted that executives were best suited to shape regulatory policy. Thus, from the transcript: “How do you get to the golden key, how do we figure out what works? And the people that know the industry better than anybody are the people who work in the industry.”

Essentially this is self-regulation under government auspices, the interpenetration of business and government, the integration of the State and capitalism, with government, as Gabriel Kolko wrote in *Triumph of Conservatism* long ago, providing a shield of protection for banking (and all of corporate America) against strict regulation. The transcript continues, her same speech on transparent favoritism to Wall Street: “I started traveling in February of ’09, so people could, you know, literally yell at me for the United States and our banking system causing this [financial crisis] everywhere. Now, that’s an oversimplification we know, but it was the conventional wisdom.” And Clinton hinted at the help she hoped to receive in her presidential bid: “It would be very difficult to run for president without raising a huge amount of money and without other people supporting you

because your opponent will have their supporters. So I think as hard as it was when I ran [for the US Senate], I think it's even harder now."

Here, with this background, let me turn to the transcripts themselves, with attention to her views on, and speeches to, Wall Street. On Oct. 18, 2013, to the CME Group, she said: "You have to keep looking over the horizon to make choices that are not only going to benefit you but...the larger economy." Fortunately, in this feel-good address (as with her other speeches) the two coincide, Wall Street self-interest redounds to the benefit of all. She goes on: "Now, one thing that came through to me loudly and clearly as Secretary of State for four years is that you have to keep looking to the future [in that capacity it turns out, to future confrontations, interventions, and regime changes]. That's what you do, and you do it extremely well. You have to keep looking over the horizon to make choices that are going to not only benefit you but your institutions and, I would hope, the larger economy." Flattery like this qualifies her for poster girl for interpenetration; as president, which is likely, finance and banking should have no worries, other than their own mistakes that they create.

When it comes to Goldman, flattery gives way to sheer gushiness (Clinton has earned her speech fees and then some, as at a Goldman Builders and Investors Summit, Oct. 29, 2013: "Many of you in this room are masters of the trend lines. You see over the horizon, you think about products that nobody has invented, and you go about the business of trying to do just that." Goldman emerges as a world beater and savior, bringing democracy to the benighted: "But the trend lines are both positive and troubling. There is still continuing movement toward open markets, toward greater innovation, toward the development of a middle class that can buy the products. As Lloyd [Goldman CEO, on first-name basis] was talking in his intro about the work that you do creating products and then making sure there's markets by fostering the kind of inclusive prosperity that includes consumers is a positive trend in many parts of the world now. Democracy is holding its own, so people are still largely living under governments of their own choosing." The pitchwoman for American capitalism makes one aware that going head-to-head with Trump reveals little daylight between them of a systemic nature, she perhaps even more chauvinistic than he on the merits and virtues of the corporate order.

And with Morgan Stanley she reaches the sublime (April 18, 2013): "I greatly appreciate when companies, like Morgan Stanley, do work in communities here and around the world that makes a difference." As introduction to that statement, she observes: "But fundamentally, we have a system that has survived and flourished [blessed capitalism, to be sure] for so long because we recognize that beyond the contest, the competition, the moment, there are larger values and stakes that we have to keep our eyes on. I think businesses thrive when communities and countries thrive."

Goldman, Morgan Stanley, here's what she has to say to Deutsche Bank on the subject of regulation—actually self-regulation (she or an adviser must have read Kolko, although she draws the opposite conclusion, the virtues of interpenetration): "Remember what Teddy Roosevelt did. Yes, he took on what he saw as the excesses in the economy, but he also stood against the excesses in politics [i.e., authentic government supervision of banking]. He didn't want to unleash a lot of nationalist, populist reaction. He wanted to try to figure out how to get back into that balance that has served America so well over our entire nationhood [the balance between business and government, private and public interests, in both cases weighted to the former]. Today, there's more that can and should be done that really has to come from the industry itself, and how we can

strengthen our economy, create more jobs at a time where that's increasingly challenging, to get back to Teddy Roosevelt's square deal." That Square Deal is, the large corporation, the major bank (remember who her audience is—Deutsche Bank), as central to social progress: "And I really believe that our country and all of you are up to that job." Clinton prefaced these remarks by stating that financial reform "really has to come from the industry itself." That refrain was certainly echoed in Bill Clinton's financial, banking, and economic policy, now continued by Mrs. Clinton.

In an AIMS Alternative Investments Symposium, Oct. 24, 2013, sponsored by Goldman, Clinton began with the same idea on proper regulation she would use throughout her speaking engagements for the firm: "The people who know the industry better than anybody are the people who work in the industry." Praise is lavished on other sponsors, Fidelity for "mak[ing] important contributions in many communities across America where you do business...." The same for Ameriprise, July 26, 2014: "So I thank you. I thank you for the work you do across our country. You contribute to Americans' financial success and security in many ways. You help families, literally, live the American dream." Finally, at the Alternative Investments Symposium, she was thanked by a Goldman officer, who said: "By the way, we really did appreciate when you were the senator from New York and your continued involvement of the issues (inaudible) to be courageous in some respects to [be] associated with Wall Street and this environment. Thank you very much." Her response: "Well, I don't feel particularly courageous. I mean, if we're going to be an effective, efficient economy, we need to have all part of that engine running well, and that includes Wall Street and Main Street." Very similar to TR, the fictive equality of both—we go up and down together—the rich and the poor are equally free to sleep under the bridge at night (Zola).

OCTOBER 24, 2016

### **Militarism: The Elephant in the Room**

Can "fiscal responsibility" be thought value-neutral? And by fiscal, we ordinarily mean treasury policy, relating to taxation, public revenue, public debt, for the layman (myself included) a hidden, arcane world best left to technocrats and statisticians, who work in mysterious, hopefully inconsequential ways, as public policy itself, subject to the political process, is determined through the broadly reigning ideology and the electoral system. So much for textbook economics divorced from the real world. Here conservatives have always had the upper hand. Fiscal responsibility conjures up balanced budgets, both governmental and household, prudence, living within one's means, all in contrast to nasty tax-and-spend liberals, profligate, wasteful, showing no respect for honesty, hard work, structural ties that bind a social order together. But what of radicals, in contradistinction to liberals? Where do they fit in? They are, for conservatives, beyond the pale altogether, repudiating fiscal responsibility as the lodestar of capitalism, and outmoded via a framework of socialism, which can order fiscal concerns not by market imperatives but societal needs and historical conditions.

I shall take the radical position, not as conservatives, or for that matter liberals, would have it, but, still value-neutral, view fiscal responsibility as a convenience by which to define and shape public policy strictly according to social needs and a humane, pacific, equalitarian worldview. In such a framework, the chief culprit of fiscal irresponsibility is capitalism itself. Why? Because in America today, the three principal areas responsible for driving up the national debt in relation to

gross domestic product are military spending, health care costs, and an inequitable system of taxation—all integral to the US in its present form: imperialism-intervention-regime change-market penetration; privatization of medicine, pharmaceutical highway robbery, ditto health insurance companies; regressive to, for extreme wealth, practically nonexistent taxation. Put together, we see a legitimated framework of exploitation which, by preserving the national debt as a guillotine over the head of society, ensures the diminution of the social welfare as people's needs remain unmet, wealth and power increasingly concentrate in fewer hands, and war, actual, potential, or made into a cultural-ideological way of life, clouds the atmosphere.

Fiscal responsibility as a capitalist shibboleth is a fraud, as a socialist—or conceivably welfare capitalist—standard, a strict and stern reminder that war and imperialism are horrendous evil, health-care needs will be satisfied as a public right, and taxation is a shared social obligation for all. There is nothing intrinsically conservative about a society keeping within its productive means: running up deficits, though ascribed to welfare programs, are, as in America, ascribable to servicing the military apparatus, subsidizing corporate advantages in domestic and world markets, and fostering through unequal wealth distribution an invidious class system. Socialism need not run up deficits because it would have the power and authority to keep everything in balance, expenditures of a humanitarian nature as well as infrastructure spending thus coming from the generation of social wealth. Welfare capitalism might have a tougher row to hoe, but the renunciation of war, a single-payer health-care system, and a steeper taxation rate on the upper tiers of wealth (along with closing the loopholes on myriad forms of tax evasion and carried interest), would at least be a useful corrective, possibly muting other areas of capitalist exploitation, including even alienation, depersonalization, and reified consumerism.

My purpose in broaching fiscal matters, in rejection of conservative orthodoxy and liberal opportunism, the first, a naked appeal to status-quo politics and structure, the second, a means of prolonging the social and cultural agonies of capitalism wrapped in the silk of progressive caring (as meanwhile war and business-government interpenetration continue), is in exposing the moral bankruptcy of America's present and future, the current presidential race merely symptomatic of the narrowness of the political-ideological pathway to incipient fascism as militarism comes further and more fully into its own. In fact, it is precisely the failure even to recognize this factor, as we are about to see, which drives this writer up the wall. The elephant in the room: the more myopic our vision, the more likely we will be stepped on (i.e., step on ourselves) and be crushed. I refer to a reasonably authoritative piece, given the stature of the authors, reflective of sane, centrist thinking, well-intentioned, yet still myopic where it counts.

One does not have to work from a Clinton-Trump adulatory-of-America context of essentials to present a critique of current thought; instead I cite the article by two esteemed establishment figures, Paul Volcker and Peter Peterson, in the New York Times, "Ignoring the Debt Problem," (Oct. 21), in which military spending, at the heart of the problem, is given half a sentence. If, in the vernacular, these are bourgeois economists/financial experts, they, within their framework of operation, have had distinguished careers and are not, for analytical purposes, sitting ducks. They begin on a strong note (my premise here, no-one benefits from escalating deficits): "Insults, invective and pandering [their reference to the campaign, "none as strange as this one"] have been poor substitutes for serious debate about the direction in which this country is going—or should be going. And a sound and sustainable fiscal structure is a key ingredient of any viable economic

policy.” Whether we agree with the outcome, they are of course right, the two candidates having wholly ignored the issue of the deficit and fiscal structure, although the words “sound and sustainable” put one on guard because of past conservative usage and implication. Yet, by that token, socialism, observing these strictures (which is entirely possible) qualifies—my, not their contention—as viable economic policy.

Their concern is justified (the figures, incidentally, serving as useful guides): “Yes, this country can handle the nearly \$600 billion federal deficit estimated for 2016. But the deficit has grown sharply this year, and will keep the national debt at about 75 percent of the gross domestic product, a ratio not seen since 1950, after the budget ballooned during World War II.” Their argument, or rather warning, as they proceed, is that the debt will be skyrocketing, so that the ratio of debt to G.D.P. will be such that the former greatly surpasses the latter, servicing the one then curtailing still further the social-welfare sector and affecting living standards. One sympathizes with their concern, for it challenges the cockiness of liberalism and liberals, in which Keynesianism, allowing for deficit spending (if not encouraging it), is somehow a magic bullet operant within existing capitalism through public spending, but therefore, without significant modification to the structure of capitalism itself. (This was partially the New Deal experience, where, through the National Recovery Administration, monopolism had increased, leaving a concentrated structural base in industry that would continue ever onward.)

In other words, Keynesianism made possible that capitalism could continue on as before. That is why, as I said above, the renunciation of war, a single-payer health-care system, and a steeper taxation rate on the upper tiers of wealth, all theoretically possible under capitalism, in America would be utterly chimerical, unrealizable, and almost as difficult to achieve as socialism. Keynesianism is an obvious palliative (moderating the tendencies toward, or the intensity of, unemployment, stagnation, structural breakdown). Our authors, Volcker and Peterson, partly see the danger, meeting it with lukewarm or warmed-over Keynesianism (they, far from being cliché-driven liberals or Neanderthal conservatives), and they observe: “Long-term, that continued growth, driven by our tax and spending policies [though still unable to transcend standard Republican rhetoric], will create the most significant fiscal challenge facing our country. The widely respected Congressional Budget Office has estimated that by midcentury our debt will rise to 140 percent of G. D. P., far above that in any previous era, even in times of war.”

Assuming the accuracy of the CBO estimate, one can sit back, business as usual (literally), call for a drastic overhaul of the welfare sector and discretionary spending, or—neither their nor Keynes’s chosen course—call for the overhaul of capitalism as a system, its replacement being socialism. As of now, the direction points rightward, the replacement, some form of fascism. To their credit, the authors criticize both Trump and Clinton (although clearly partial to the latter), one because he “has called for a combination of deep tax cuts that appear to far exceed proposed spending reductions,” the other because she “has set out more balanced and detailed proposals,” but which “would still fail to stabilize and reduce our debt burden.”

Their point is that “[w]hoever wins, the new president will eventually face fiscal realities that force him or her to develop strategies for decreasing the national debt as a share of the economy over the long term.” And my point, in their frame of reference, these strategies conserve capitalism still less serviceable to democratization perhaps even than currently, but that socialism in actuality does not benefit from, and could well eliminate, the nation’s debt burden. Debt, pace Keynes, serves

no useful purpose, its elimination through if need be a thorough revolutionary democratization which eliminates all privilege, all waste, all surplus value, would, by necessity casting off capitalism, make of debt burdens a relic of the past.

Finally, we are able to smoke out enlightened bourgeois economics. A mechanistic (fatalistic?) grasp of interest rates is the tail wagging the dog: “Our current debt may be manageable at a time of unprecedentedly low interest rates. But if we let our debt grow, and interest rates normalize, the interest burden alone would choke our budget and squeeze out other essential spending.” Why my criticism? Because what follows is the only reference, indirect at that, to militarism, specifically, military expenditures, which are accepted as night follows day, not to be questioned, not to be linked to the debt burden and/or deficit spending: “There would be no room for the infrastructure programs and the defense rebuilding that today have wide support.” Instead, to make their case they turn to greener pastures, the means for stimulating capitalism: “It’s not just federal spending that would be squeezed. The projected rise in federal deficits would compete for funds in our capital markets and far outrun the private sector’s capacity to save, to finance industry and home purchases, and to invest abroad.” Heaven forbid such catastrophes, rendering Volcker and Peterson Keynesians in spite of themselves.

It is almost as though they are making a last ditch fight against socialism, either reduce the debt burden or face the abyss. “Instead,” they go on, “we’d be dependent on foreign investors’ acquiring most of our debt—making the government dependent on the ‘kindness of strangers’ who may not be so kind as the I.O.U.s mount up.” The frame of reference is fraying around the edges; time to dig in and make a stand: “We can’t let that happen—not if we want an America that is able to provide growth and stability at home while maintaining global leadership. We would risk returning with a vengeance to stagflation—the ugly combination of inflation and economic stagnation that we tasted in the 1970s.” Parenthetically, no-one seems to question “maintaining global leadership,” itself intimately connected to militarism, military allocations in relation to G.D.P., ditto the global ring of bases, interventions, regime changes, and the like.

So what is left? Nothing could be more incisively stated: “The solutions are clear enough. A realistic approach toward the major entitlement programs is required, given that they are projected to account for all of the growth of future noninterest spending.” (Add to militarism interest payments as nonnegotiable.) There have to be “gradual adjustments to the Social Security system” and “more efficient” health-care systems, “with better approaches toward cost control.” Whether capitalism or socialism, one can appreciate their concern over the latter (mine: socialism cannot afford to squander public resources): “Since health care represents 70 percent of the growth of our major entitlement programs over the next 30 years, bending the cost curve is essential to the long-term well-being of our economy.” Yes, provided of course bending the curve is not abused, as I believe here is the case, given the somewhat pious view on entitlements.

To be fair to Volcker and Peterson, while implicitly reducing the dimensions of the welfare state (even within a capitalist frame of reference, especially as a long-term proposition), they do build fiscal integrity into the system with respect to taxation, a cut above both conservative and liberal alternatives as commonly sought: “It’s no secret that our federal tax system is broken—unfair, inefficient and prone to political manipulation. It’s filled with exclusions, deductions, exemptions and preferential rates—so-called tax expenditures—that are ripe for reform.” This is not, however, a call for the redistribution of wealth via taxation (nor is that to be expected), but being serious about

closing loopholes on a range of practices is no mean thing. At best, they make better what is within their frame of reference (I suppose an adequate definition of reform): “Those policies cost about \$1.5 trillion each year and disproportionately benefit the well off [the closest they come to acknowledging the need for a redistribution of burden]. Tax reform could provide better incentives for economic growth, while raising more revenue, even as the code is simplified.”

Their final pitch—one grants their sincerity as persons of good will, nevertheless drawn inward in defense of capitalism: “But we face an immutable fact. Fair and responsible reforms will take years to implement. And businesses and individuals will need time to adjust.” Radicals would reject that immutableness, as an example of kicking the can down the road. Still the note of urgency they sound is far better than Panglossian liberalism, where the road never ends: “Delaying action now will make the needed changes only more painful and difficult later on, while also increasing the risk of financial crisis before the reforms are even made. That is why the real debate should begin immediately.” Criticizing both candidates in the final debate for “miss[ing] the opportunity to lay out their visions for a fiscally responsible, long-term future for our country,” they wittily close: “Take some advice from two observers who have been around for a while: The long term gets here before you know it.”

And it was Keynes himself who famously said, “In the long term we’ll all be dead.” No-one here has the final word, problematic that capitalism can transcend its limitations and contradictions. American militarism subjoined to a demiurge which demands global leadership, is an invitation to the fascistization of exceptionalism.

OCTOBER 25, 2016

### **Centrist Fascism: Lurching Forward**

The third presidential debate, almost by design, was an exercise in obfuscation, neither candidate willing to display an expanded, detailed position which might reveal substance, ideology, political-economic ramifications of her/his policy on fundamental areas affecting America’s domestic structure of wealth and power or its international framework of war, intervention, commercial penetration, and regime change. In other words, this was the ideal setting for personalism, a politics of distraction, as systemic-historical forces of interpenetration (of business and government), paralleled by the related development of militarism, expansion, and social regimentation have become integrated: distilled and fused as a meaningful stage of fascism in America.

This is no ordinary election, but the tipping point in the organization of capitalism as to whether “democracy,” enclosed in quotation marks because having the salience of a class-state from the society’s formation grounded in slavery, hierarchy, unequal wealth-distribution, and finally corporate/monopolistic aggrandizement, an excellent springboard to fascism under conditions of perceived decline and/or stalled internal growth (both operant today), has now turned the corner into a qualitatively different formation. I suspect this has happened gradually over the last half-century, without surrendering the inaccurate designation of democracy. It is, however, an anachronism never intended in the first place, and the candidates show at best the traits of the caudillo, a Franco or Mussolini, but still a far cry from Hitler, or America as Nazi Germany.



Exaggerating the degree of fascism serves no useful purpose. But the portents are nonetheless real, nowhere better seen than in cutting beneath the surface of the final presidential debate. The absence of policy-discussion itself mocks professions of political-ideological differentiation between the major parties. There really is very little, a consensus on the militarism-advanced capitalism nexus which by itself prevents alternative courses of action leading to other than cosmetic variants of what I am terming centrist fascism, a lockstep of ideology, structure, and political culture concentrating power of elite groups which themselves are unified in thought on what might be called full spectrum dominance, whether we speak of foreign economic policy, the environment, or other areas defining modern times.

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There follows a closer look at the debate, the foregoing a prologue to the societal process, long in motion, of lurching (aka, staggering) forward, no longer imperceptible, gradual, toward fully consummated abandonment of democratic institutions and values. At no time before has America faced such an unenviable choice for the presidency, character flaws alone far less determining than policy consequences, in fashioning a government and polity held together by antithetical bonds of mistrust, hate, personal insecurity, and a demiurgic quest for unilateral conquest under unpropitious world conditions, circumstances of great-powers' hostility and confrontation exacerbating near-inherent tendencies of internal militarism.

In demeanor, neither candidate appeared the paragon of intelligence or honesty, but that need not concern us. What does, is policy or the feigned absence thereof. The first question, on the powers of the Supreme Court and its judicial decisions, the issue came down to support of the Second Amendment, and despite differences on its construction, Clinton's seeming criticisms or modifications of it become nullified by her statement, "Well, first of all, I support the second amendment." Although she wants "reasonable regulation" and responsible use, offering more protections than Trump, who pridefully acknowledged the endorsement of the NRA, there is not the clear-cut separation of views necessary, since the issue of gun control is code for, among other things, an outright appeal to militarism, vigilantism, and race, that one looks for in attacking the prevailing gun culture.

Where differences were strong involved cultural politics, particularly abortion, in which, unlike Trump, Clinton favored *Rowe v. Wade*, with Trump ranting that she would be taking the baby and "rip[ping] the baby out of the womb." My only reservation here as to the question of the candidates' essential sameness is that, in opposition to my radical colleagues, I view cultural politics less as a test of fundamental civil liberties and civil rights than as a popular diversion from the democratization of structure, power, and the abrogation of imperialism, nuclear war, and racial discrimination.

I know how unpopular such a position is among radicals, and yes, as separate issues I'd of course favor abortion rights and those pertaining to the LGBT community as essential to the wider process of democratization, but (a) less so than equitable income-and-wealth distribution, and (b) on condition that, unlike Clinton, who treats them in a vacuum, the issues such as abortion are joined to wider issues on war and peace, corporate power, indeed, the retention of capitalism, especially in its present form. Conceivably, one could advocate for the full range of demands in cultural politics, and still favor centrist fascism in its systemic-structural-cultural attributes. Clinton embodies such a

view, which is one reason I think she cannot be sufficiently distinguished from Trump. Wall Street can absorb cultural politics; it cannot, by definition, steps leading to the advent of socialism. Authenticity of, and gradations of, radicalism are matters of extreme importance, not simply for analytical purposes, but on the practice of capitalistic absorption of discontent. Currently, cultural politics are the help-mate of the status quo. I say this not as a hard-bitten Stalinist, but as an ordinary radical of the old kind.

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The moderator Chris Wallace, turned next to the topic of immigration, where the Trumpean symbol of the Wall looms largely in the discussion. Trump summarizes, “Drugs are pouring in through the border. We have no country if we have no border. Hillary wants to give amnesty. She wants to have open borders.” An open-and-shut case of principal differences? Despite her deeply moving appeal for the protection of undocumented workers (I am not being sarcastic here), and her warning that police-state tactics would be needed to enforce deportation, she still maintains: “I have been for border security for years. I voted for border security in the United States Senate. And my comprehensive immigration reform plan, of course includes border security.” The continuity of proposal is not broken, only, as she notes, “I want to put our resources where I think they’re most needed.” Trump reminds her she voted for a wall, and her reply: “There are some limited places where that was appropriate. There also is necessarily going to be new technology and how to employ that.” Clinton adds: “We will not have open borders. That is a rank mischaracterization. We will have secure borders. But we will also have reform.” These are not sufficiently spelled out.

The discussion lingers. Wallace observes on open borders that in a speech Clinton “gave to a Brazilian bank for which you were paid \$225,000,” you said, “My dream is a hemispheric common market with open trade and open borders,” to which she made qualified replied, the reference was only to energy—a step back. But then she proceeded to an interesting segue (literally without interruption): “But you [to Wallace] are very clearly quoting from WikiLeaks. What is really important about WikiLeaks is that the Russian government has engaged in espionage against Americans.” Clinton is wholly dismissive of WikiLeaks’s accuracy, but more, its subversive role in US affairs.

Then, she engages, as she has done before, in red-baiting, connecting Trump with Putin, and by implication selling out American interests and demonstrating softness toward Russia: “They have hacked American websites, American accounts of private people, of institutions. Then they have given that information to WikiLeaks for the purpose of putting it on the internet.” (WikiLeaks is somehow involved in the conspiracy with Russia to destroy the integrity of the American electoral system.) Then she continues: “This has come from the highest levels of the Russian government. Clearly from Putin himself in an effort, as 17 of our intelligence agencies have confirmed, to influence our election.” That isn’t enough. The noose of collaboration tightens: “So I actually think the most important question this evening, Chris, is finally, will Donald Trump admit and condemn that the Russians are doing this, and make it clear that he will not have the help of Putin in this election.” Joe McCarthy could not have said it better.

Further: “That he rejects Russian espionage against Americans, which he actually encouraged in the past. Those are the questions we need answered. We’ve never had anything like this happen in any of our elections before.” One is not persuaded by the confirmation of “17 of our intelligence

agencies,” given their overriding mission to politicize intelligence for purposes of advancing the American national interest, concomitant with interfering in the elections of other nations, from foreign-aid assistance and joint treaties to dirty tricks and planned, often executed, coups. One can almost sympathize with Trump, did he not share the same argument, when he declares: “That was a great pivot off the fact that she wants open borders. Okay? How did we get on to Putin?”

That opens the way to an acerbic dialogue about the Cold War. Recently I had sought to discriminate between Trump and Clinton on the question of Russia, yet this difference is neither sufficient to disclaim their overall similarity on a broader geopolitical framework nor, here with Trump beginning to back down, his own proactive militancy in foreign policy. Neither candidate is above the use of force, both are profoundly committed to an America-first position and use of patriotism to silence opposition to US corporate privilege and supremacy in international affairs. Yet, politics is politics, and they seek a sliver of light to show who is fairest of them all. Trump: “She wants open borders. People are going to pour into our country....She wants 550% more people than Barack Obama.... [What threw me before again follows] Now we can talk about Putin. I don’t know Putin. He said nice things about me. If we got along well, that would be good. If Russia and the United States got along well and went after ISIS, that would be good.

He has no respect for her. He has no respect for our president.” Trump shares that sentiment. But then he enters deeper water: “We’re in very serious trouble. Because we have a country with tremendous nuclear warheads, 1,800, by the way. Where they expanded and we didn’t. 1,800 nuclear warheads. And she is playing chicken.” He apparently would not.

And Clinton: “Wait.” Trump: “Putin from everything I see has no respect for this person.” Clinton: “Well, that’s because he would rather have a puppet as president of the United States.” Trump: “No puppet. You’re the puppet.” That sets Clinton off in the validation of her Cold War, anti-Russian credentials: “It is pretty clear you won’t admit that the Russians have engaged in cyber attacks against the United States of America. That you encouraged espionage against our people. [She does all but call him a traitor] That you are willing to spout the Putin line, sign up for his wish list, break up NATO, do whatever he wants to do. And that you continue to get help from him because he has a very clear favorite in this race.... I find this deeply disturbing.” Clinton and Trump then go back and forth on alleged Russian hacking, she trotting out the 17 intelligence agencies, he, “Yeah, I doubt it, I doubt it.” Clinton: “He would rather believe Vladimir Putin than the military and intelligence professionals who are sworn to protect us. I find that just absolutely—” Trump: “She doesn’t like Putin because Putin has outsmarted her at every step of the way.”

I dwell on the topic and the exchange to demonstrate Clinton’s war-provoking perspective on foreign policy toward Russia. Yet on the hacking, under pressure from Wallace, Trump concedes his opposition to hacking, and in a mixed message shows ambivalence toward Russia: “I never met Putin. He is not my best friend. But if the United States got along with Russia, it wouldn’t be so bad. Let me tell you, Putin has outsmarted her and Obama at every single step of the way.” But “outsmarted” implies Putin cannot do that to him. On the missile treaty: “Take a look at the start-up that they signed. The Russians have said, according to many, many reports, I can’t believe they allowed us to do this. They create warheads and we can’t. The Russians can’t believe it.... She has been outsmarted and outplayed worse than anybody I’ve ever seen in any government whatsoever.” Clinton’s response (they have drifted a long way from immigration): “I find it ironic that he is raising nuclear weapons. This is a person who has been very cavalier, even casual about the use of

nuclear weapons.” More bickering, she, “When the president gives the order, it must be followed,” he, “I have 200 generals and admirals endorsing me, 21 congressional medal of honor recipients. As for Japan and other countries, we are being ripped off by everybody in the world.” Trump’s only complaint is it costs too much: “We are spending a fortune doing it. They have the bargain of the century.”

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On the economy, the third topic, the usual disagreement over taxes and regulation occurs, lower (Republican) versus higher (Democratic), but capitalism in its monopolistic form is neither under consideration nor directly amenable to regulation. Clinton’s Wall Street ties are ignored by her protestations: “Well, I think the middle class thrives, America thrives. So my plan is based on growing the economy giving middle class families many more opportunities.” These include a jobs program, helping small business, and making “college debt-free and for families making less than \$125,000,” free tuition from public colleges and universities. Less convincing, given her long-term record and more recent speaking fees, is her statement: “Most of the gains in the last years since the great recession have gone to the very top. So we are going to make the wealthy pay their fair share.” Clinton calls Trump’s plan, “trickle-down economics on steroids.” Yes, excellent, but does hers promote the democratization of the political economy or merely attach a smattering of welfare capitalism onto a monopolistic, regulatory-favorable, trade-enhancing foundation?

Granted, differences exist within capitalism, but from the standpoint of domestic differentials of wealth and power, their plans, vision, execution (the latter, a predisposed government) closely align, Trump the more autarkic, nationalistic, Clinton, the more international, and perhaps sophisticated on matters of growth and expansion. Trump sounds like a cry-baby when it comes to taxation: “We will have a massive tax increase under Hillary Clinton’s plan.” He adds, “We’re going to cut taxes massively. We’re going to cut business taxes massively.” Also, the protection afforded to Germany, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, will cost them, no more freebies. Too, the outsourcing of jobs would cease, or the products subject to heavy tariffs on their return to this country. The differences appear promising, except that only the strategies differ to the same end. Clinton: “I will not raise taxes on anyone making \$250,000 or less. I also will not add a penny to the debt. I have costed out what I’m going to do.” It turns out her principal economic criticism of Trump involves an increased national debt, not the fate and the condition of the working class; balanced budgets would lead to greater employment, workers themselves stalled in place, prey to alienation and consumerism.

As in other areas, the bickering continues, economic growth founded on a trickle-down context for Trump, investing “from the middle out, and the ground up,” for Clinton, but always with job creation for both divorced from structural change and government-business interpenetration. From this point, the atmosphere becomes more charged, the candidates’ interactions ruder and more unpleasant, the positions themselves less fundamental still in details and consequences, Trump boastful about personal business success, Clinton, devotion to the underprivileged and the poor, and assertion and denial of Trump’s promiscuous sexual conduct. Rather than go on, because we have already blocked out areas of major concern, I should like to comment on the entire fiasco, disguising centrist fascism as democracy. Trump himself, on sexual groping, wanted desperately to cut matters short, or rather, drop all semblance of civility: “I believe, Chris, she [Clinton] got these people to step forward. If it wasn’t, they get their ten minutes of fame, but they were all totally—it was all fiction. It was lies and it was fiction.”

What is not fiction is the similitude of antidemocratic paradigms of governance. When one cuts through the seeming differences, from gay rights and abortion to the destruction of e-mails, the qualitative level of fruitful discussion and analysis should rest on the conservation of privilege in America, its institutional expression, abidance, furtherance, and intensification, and the political underpinnings on which it rests. Hierarchy, racism, the military cast of mind, all are the logical and necessary product of America's pattern of capitalist development, in its purist formation perversive of class consciousness and dissent, and structurally intended to ensure unequal reward and the degradation of labor. In this light, the presidential contest and resulting election make perfect sense. At one point, Trump announces, fittingly: "We fought for the right in Palm Beach to put up the American flag." It can be said, the same holds for Chappaqua.

OCTOBER 27, 2016

### **The Election: Does It Matter Who Wins?**

Antecedently, does it matter, period? America transcends its historical development, revealing a cumulative trend which pronounces even presidential elections a solemn farce, as a fascistic societal formation, to all indications, beckons. It is on a collision course with its own destiny, inner tendencies, ideology, and class distribution. Exceptionalism represents a tightly-coiled nation, out of maneuverability, fated to consume itself (and possibly the world) in domestic self-hatred, foreign aggression, and international confrontation as a permanent stance.

What happened along the way? Its unique attachment to capitalism from at least the late eighteenth century ensured a one-dimensional political-structural course which selectively eliminated, ruled out, or weakened non-capitalistic elements—a purist formation, then, feeding on itself, creating and maintaining boundaries to social change that ensured against alternative values and pathways to the future.

Whatever arises from such a context is then turned inward and made adaptable to the needs of a capitalist state and society. The Revolutionary War was one of independence, not transformation, so that America, no longer a colonial appendage of Britain, could exercise its own form of mercantilism, internal colonialism, subjection of indigenous resistance. Likewise, the Civil War cleared the historical slate of premodern capitalism, of which plantation slavery, was the linchpin, to the breakdown of all restrictions, ushering in a laissez-faire capitalism which offered no obstacles to a monopoly-capital consolidative framework.

In bold, by 1900, America now a certified imperial power, the Open Door policy pursued for three decades already ensuring the drive for universalized market penetration, and a prominent role in world affairs, witnessed the removal of slavery into a social vacuum to be replaced by the exploitation of industrial labor, an agricultural economy controlled by financial, transportation, and marketing interests, and, of course, racism per se as the unmistakable heritage of previous servitude.

What a start toward greatness (!), a background for the antidemocratic modernization up to today and into the future. Theodore Roosevelt would give us the interpenetration of business and government and the battleship navy, Woodrow Wilson, the federal reserve system, regularization of monopoly, and an internationalism inseparable from anticommunism, as witness the Siberian Intervention into the Bolshevik Revolution. By this point, the die is cast, so that throughout the

'twenties we see, via trade association activity, the privatization of the economy systemically nailed down, the NAM and Chamber of Commerce illustrative of the shaping of the business system.

The New Deal, under FDR, may be viewed, alternatively, as a break in the historical process of capitalist development, or, on close inspection, a muted effort to graft a welfare state onto business foundations—as the most American society and social structure could tolerate. But in any case, once more, at a pivotal moment, unable and unwilling to undergo a fundamental transformation. For America, World War II was, by necessity, anti-fascist on the battlefield and with international alliances, yet imperialism and anticommunism had by Bretton Woods defined the postwar vision of America's world direction, FDR's death confirming trends he might have otherwise altered or mitigated. From that point, 1945-6, no internal obstacles remained or were present to arrest the present course: a unilateral posture of global dominance. Anticommunism abroad had its corresponding red-baiting at home, leading to a long-term ideological shrinkage and encrustation of tolerated societal boundaries.

Kennedy was America's guiding spirit for the liberalization of fascism—intervention, regime change, nuclear preparedness, made acceptable and plausible through policies and rhetoric of the US as a humanitarian beacon to the world's oppressed (meanwhile enlarging global market shares, financial hegemony, and armed conflict), so that with Johnson and Vietnam America revealed its true identity, which has not changed. In this light, the present campaign and election, filled as it is with copious warnings to the world of America's greatness (coded for military supremacy), extends the past into the future, lacking only the sophistication, ideological and political, of former times able to cement the image of capitalism and democracy.

America now is nakedly belligerent, on the war path while drastically streamlining its own political economy, as, e.g., through outsourcing, industrial division of labor, and extreme emphasis on the financialization of capitalism itself, combining internal-external processes to hold its position in a world political economy and power system where unilateral prestige and military prowess no longer hold, reducing America to one among equals, an intolerable state to a nation habituated to international success. The strain is showing. Clinton and Trump are both playing to an American public coddled by decades of patriotism, antiradicalism, and, treatment of the environment is here instructive, nihilism, whether through the depredation of nature or ignorance with respect to climate change.

Clinton and Trump, and the political parties and party system that stand behind them, epitomize the logical outcome, viz., moral bankruptcy, of advanced capitalism in America, in which war, militarism, and defense budgets and production all become necessary to avoid economic stagnation or poor growth, while the ideological reproduction of exceptionalism through its various historical stages ensures a blindness to the human costs of impending war. The election is rendered meaningless because continuity has been preserved with an antiradical heritage now transposed into a setting so whipped up with neurotic frustration at having lost undisputed world supremacy and at home increasing wealth and income differentiation that a paralysis of will is setting in, making the militarization of policy (and, via massive surveillance, regimentation or stringent conformity in the political realm) not only thinkable but operable.

OCTOBER 28, 2016

## **America at the Crossroads: Abrogation of Democracy**

Election eve, one finds the nation itself to be more pathetically unaware than the leading candidates are evil (morally reprehensible, arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct), although the margin of difference is negligible. The crowds gathered to hear Clinton and Trump, t-shirts and hoodies decorated with campaign slogans, are two sides of the same mindless fascistic adoration of power, righteousness, indignation, a voluntary submission betraying the same ideological convictions of American exceptionalism and psychodynamics of gut hatred for and fear of difference from themselves and image of ethnocentric superiority.

Study the faces as the news cameras pan the waiting lines or audiences, smugness, occasional contorted features, feigned innocence disguising certitude. The emptiness of the American public, obediently laying down before billionaire wealth and militaristic narcissism (here self-love engendered through capitalism and assisted by compulsive attachment to the hegemonic purposes of the State). Each side, contemptuous of the other, in reality, brothers/sisters-in-arms, raises to leadership the perfect expression of their own, and hence similar if not identical, needs for recognition to cover their inner nakedness of spirit and purpose.

Trump, a bottomless pit of mammon-worship, Clinton, a sinkhole of war and aggression, express the fusion of capitalism and militarism, each in America vital to the presence and fruition of the other, that typifies the national mission of unilateral global domination. It was not always thus, although historical-institutional development pointed the direction for at least a century, when America outstripped its earlier foundations, the normalization of advanced industrial capitalism, to claim world moral-political pre-eminence based on spurious privileged association with God in carrying out His/Her divine mission of promised economic salvation.

The formula has been a surefire winner because scrupulously backed by the real or implied threat (and use) of force, a silent militarism when not engaged in war to announce global financial-and-market penetration presumed to be uncontested (or when contested, the mark of the adversary). Exceptionalism is the ideological battering ram to knock down all opposition, and for those standing in line for the political bread-and-circuses of the two major parties, a validation of their distorted hatreds brought on by their own subordination in the great chain of capitalist being.

If deep-down, though not consciously admitted, there is recognition of systemic rottenness in misshaping their yearnings and thwarting their present wellbeing and future prospects, this throws them, again both sides of the supposed political divide, into the arms of the Leadership Structure not unlike the authoritarian submission characterizing fascism in the transition from Weimar to Nazi Germany. (To be still in the transition phase and not to have as yet crossed the line, holds little promise of reversion to democratic government; too much has happened to suggest drawing back from the brink.) Collective ego-loss, seen in the faces of the ecstatic political faithful, the now-worshippers of power, goes a long way to explaining the candidates and their visions on offer.

A closed system awaits the body politic. There is little room for turning left or right, when the center subsumes an already hard-bitten right and the near-ejection of the left from the political spectrum. The vanished center, however fictitious, is kept alive for purposes of self-deception and authoritative indoctrination, a useful cloak for democratic pretensions, as meanwhile the society is placed, willingly so, on a permanent footing of structural hierarchy at home, incessant intervention

abroad. The interests of capitalism must be guarded (and celebrated) at all times, lest an alternative way of life become visible, founded on humane standards of international peace and societal betterment. To break out of the present imprisonment in invidious class debasement, is more painful, given long-term ideological habituation, than risking a future of freedom (of system, of conscience, of social solidarity).

Thus, only days remain in the exercise of meaningless choice. After that, one can expect few impedances to the downward cast of policy, with increasing risks of war, class division, false consciousness to grease the rails of additional discontents as context for resentments and hatreds poisoning the atmosphere. More environmental spoliation, more gun violence, as tokens of the wayward path to fascism.

NOVEMBER 2, 2016

### **One Week, and Counting: Bottom-Fishing in America**

Webster: frequenting the bottom. When a right-wing cell (FBI), from its inception, at the heart of government, now appears to the Left of the leading candidate for president (Clinton), one knows that she is fishing on the shoreline of fascism. From a democratic standpoint, it doesn't get any worse. Even her challenger, matching her stride for stride in vulgarian (pretentious, indecent), gut-authoritarianism, the two the Janus-faced expression of the Class-State, at least does not demonize Putin and Russia, as preparatory, in her case, to still wider confrontation, including China, as dangerously leading up to a catastrophic war, or at first the breakdown of the international order.

The FBI, from cops and robbers, to reds and fellow subversives, as television and popular opinion would have it, was a spearhead for McCarthyism and a practical annex of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Those were the days, from Baby-face Nelson to the Rosenbergs, and now, hardly chastened from its turbid (muddy, foul, opaque) past, still the guardian of American innocence, Director Comey makes one correct move to undo the legacy of J. Edgar Hoover, and the American political world falls apart. I am not a fan of Comey's for his initial exoneration of Clinton in her use of a private server at State, but surely, this is an eye-opener, about how far the political spectrum has shifted to the Far Right.

Whomever wins the election, America digs itself deeper into the cesspool of hierarchical class-differentiation, wealth-concentration, a pervasive ideological atmosphere of solipsistic hatred at home for human difference, rancid hegemony abroad for any who seek an alternative path to modernization away from the example of US petrifying capitalism. This election reveals that America, like a broken record, is stuck, playing over and over again the themes of domestic repression and foreign counterrevolution, the ideal synthesis for the unilateral assertion of world power. Neither candidate nor major party distances itself from the latter goal.

Comey, perhaps against his will and ideological proclivities, achieves standing here, merely, as he should, by doing his duty. The bipartisan consensus maneuvering in place to chastise him reveals the dark reality of a nation so devoted to denial and untruth, possibly to cover over its sins of commission (war crimes, indigenous racism and xenophobia) and omission (failure to act on environmental degradation, an adequate system of health care, a military budget crowding out the general welfare), that it has lost its way and falsified its original promised constitutional existence.



America is presently normless, and has been since capitalism inaugurated its take-off stage following the Civil War. And before that, with institutionalized slavery, internal genocidal expansion, and cap-in-hand deference to political ideologues not adverse to compromise with, if not actually representing, vested interests.

Scratch America from the democratic column, transposed now to an enlarged banana republic wherein one can expect, from either party and successful candidate, enhanced features of an already ripening Police State. Surveillance, proscription, total exclusion of viable methods, measures, and structural changes pointed toward democratization, America will formally become what it already is: a panicked response to the self-realization of its nihilistic core of moral values and systemic attributes—a nuclear-armed Goliath lacking soul and conscience, and for that reason a menace to world peace and self-renewal at home. No, Comey, by his actions, is not the enemy, but one who for the first time has put on his spectacles and looked around him. There are some things that even an ardent “patriot” cannot stomach.

I recall how in the 1960s, e.g., Mississippi Freedom Summer, the FBI would interrogate us, try to sow doubts in the hearts of the demonstrators, act as intimidators pure and simple, combined with its undercover role in breaking up antiwar protests throughout the decade, so I hardly have much hope that things have changed. Yet, my hat is off to Comey, even if only to anger Clinton, force Democrats into self-protective mode, and raise questions about the rotten stinking fish used to fertilize her and the party’s position on war and peace, capitalism (Wall Street’s Miss America), and the Clintons’ own mind-boggling accumulation of personal wealth—all of which is instinctively known by the public, but unable to extricate from the mental prison of submerged guilt for totalitarian ways and practices.

We await the election, a studied exercise in un-freedom, where tyranny of false consciousness defines the psychological mental set of America, what Adorno writing sixty-six years ago called authoritarian submission, a framework where the Leadership Principle comes to the foreground if it has not already. Parallels to the incipient stages of Nazism are not an exaggeration, and it is not a loud-mouthed Trump who is necessarily the greatest danger. He is predominantly all-surface. It is Clinton who plumbs the depths of arrogance, ambition, congealed militarism. America, R.I.P.

My New York Times Comment to its editorial, “James Comey’s Big Mistake,” 11-1-16, follows:

Comey acted honorably. Unlike Hoover, he is here depoliticizing the FBI. The Times has demonstrated such partiality to Clinton, in news selection as well as editorial opinion, that it is hard to take its criticism seriously. Endorsement is one thing, blind-siding the other side quite different. Are not emails a legitimate area of investigation? Does not the public have the right to know, especially in an election? If there is no smoking gun, this will redound to Clinton’s benefit; if there is, yes, it might change minds. But what is wrong with that?

Clinton invariably is treated with kid gloves. Even the initial issue, the use of a private server to transact government business, is forgotten. Rather than jump on Comey, why not revisit the whole question—which Comey had originally dismissed—of Clinton’s valuing of transparency, and from there (although it is now late in the game) her whole foreign policy framework and hostility, in particular, to Putin and Russia?

To criticize Clinton does not necessarily make one an apologist for Trump. Call the shots with equal endeavor; responsible journalism requires no less.

NOVEMBER 10, 2016

### **Establishment Liberalism: A Curse on Democracy**

Clinton is defeated. The war-monger, bipartisan elite system may possibly have suffered a setback with Trump's election. It's too early to know, but if political-economic nationalism takes precedence over the belligerent, confrontational National Security State, then, despite Trump's ethnocentric framework, we are better off, as is the world, than under a Clinton-Democratic victory. The latter is the true menace in international politics, which at this point signifies greater importance than the domestic side.

Clinton was on a collision course with Putin (and possibly Xi). On a structural level, she had America poised for continuing Obama's foreign policy, from intervention, military alliances, and regime change to armed drone targeted assassination, a reprehensible chapter in American foreign relations. On a personal level, it might have been worse: her pathological aggression runs deep, a barely suppressed public effort to prove her mettle on all occasions of conflict. Behind the composed mask, one could sense her hostility toward Russia, her fear that America would appear weak unless maximum effort was applied to its containment and the ultimate removal of Putin, her profound insecurity when not engaged in the deployment of force.

This does not speak well for the Democratic party, once the champion of working-class rights and anti-fascism, but that was long ago and ended with the death of FDR and the aftermath of World War II. For two-thirds of a century, the party, marching step-by-step with Republicans, has been edging toward World War III. From think-tank policy wonks to hegemonic zealots, Clinton, her husband, and Obama, have stood out, with their sophisticated corporatism, even more than many Republicans, as purveyors of a globalization vision directly tied to the twin foundations of US business supremacy and unilateral military-ideological dominance.

A Clinton win would have been more of the same, with the continuance of Obama's massive-surveillance program at home and the promotion of finance capital as the base of economic concentration and commercial penetration abroad. No wonder the turn to Trump, although I doubt that his supporters took the measure of her record, seeing instead mere elitism per se and political ambition for its own sake. But what can we expect from Trump? Surely not a complete reversal of policy, a renunciation of conflict, a sudden awakening to the essential dignity and entitlement to human rights of all people.

Economic nationalism is not a seedbed for respect of humanity. It can too easily turn into Fortress America, possessing a xenophobic core. Trump seems part-way there already, from his statements and the disclosure of those surrounding him. Yet I am heartened if still skeptical that he may disengage—yes, call it isolationism—from America's seemingly permanent Cold-War posture, that which is the source of liberal fears, so closely identified with the National Security State, and, rather, adopt a peaceful attitude toward Russia as well as China. Cyrus Eaton, businessman from an earlier generation, thought such cooperation in world affairs could be achieved—and he was ridiculed much as Trump would be given America's vested interest in global conflict.

Liberalism has demonstrated its moral bankruptcy; for that, we have Democrats, with rare exceptions, to thank since Truman and Kennedy. Liberalism equates with imperialism and antiradicalism; radicalism does not deal in drone assassination, massive defense spending, policies tailored to further the interests of Wall Street. If for no other reason, Trump's election is welcome because, should he prove unworthy of respect, this would stand out clearly, and therefore could be opposed. With liberals, on the other hand, bread-and-circuses is a successful strategy thus far of obfuscation and creating the setting for false consciousness. Trump, preferable to Clinton, is clarity of social vision to be realized, and then radicalism, no longer suffocated, could come back into its own.

Racism divides the working class. Blacks can no longer find comfort in racial solidarity (uncritical support of Obama), just as gender—smashing glass ceilings—has also given Clinton a free pass. Both Obama and Clinton are the enemies of humankind, with their lust for war and faith in wealth. Somewhere, somehow, America must transcend its baser self, a task presently reserved for radicalism. Whether Trump proves to be just another class-enemy, or, through foreign policy reaches an accommodation with Russia and China, thus diminishing the paralysis of the Cold War, and thereby allowing for dissident thought and action to take hold, we will know the answer shortly.

NOVEMBER 17, 2016

### **Political System: Bottom Fishing/Opaque Shield**

In this election, Trump and Clinton were both extrapolations from Obama, who in turn dates back to Truman-Kennedy and all points in between to the present, a unified structural-ideological expression of corporatist fascism characterized by successively incremental growth. 1945-2016: hermetically sealed, locked in, undeviating Cold-War nourished military-market expansion, this has been a pathway to feel-good, patriotic, liberal totalitarianism in which the business system (aka, advanced, financially-empowered capitalism) has done its work in merging war abroad with alienation at home, a desensitization to the means of achieving permanent hegemonic status in a world no longer ripe for American conquest.

The failure is manifest, not for want of trying, nor habituation to global dominance for much of the period. Slippage breeds desperation and the perception of disaster. Anything goes, for remaining on top. "Establishment" is bandied about, yet the term is accurate and aptly descriptive. America has, in practice, a ruling class, the integration of wealth, power, and legitimacy, once economically-derived, but since at least 1980 dependent for its suasion and effectiveness on military strength, sufficiently distorting the overall mix as to bear out the fascistic designation. Clinton-Obama-Trump, a tightly coiled triumvirate, despite efforts at propagandistic exaggeration and deception, reawakens the spirit of the 1930s and Axis globalization, where only FDR and the New Deal, and its world coalition, staved off aggression, defeat, mind-numbing conformity, regimentation, and subordination.

But for America, that was only an historical blip, as its own twentieth-century march to monopoly capital, an antilabor ethos, and the thrusting forward of anticommunism has been to create homogeneity and silence dissent. Backgrounds do not lie. The heavy-handed application of nuclear "diplomacy" cast a pall (a coffin-like overspreading element that produces debilitation and gloom—here though harnessed to an air of superiority and self-righteousness for those bringing it

about) on the policy framework from war's aftermath, which made possible an unchallenged internal rightward direction with HUAC and McCarthyism, themselves the logical inheritance of the persecution and prosecution of the Wobblies and the Palmer Raids, pointing the way to unrelieved pressures on, if not pulverization of, a traditional Left sensibility focused on economic democratization, civil liberties, and world peace—all, by now, held in disdain and the pretext for unfolding counterrevolution.

For radicalism, we now have the titillation of cultural politics, people out on the street, while ruling groups laugh up their sleeves. Transgender bathrooms will not stop Goldman Sachs, Boeing, Monsanto, General Electric, themselves not the most powerful banking and corporate interests necessarily, as the loop of power tightens and becomes more cohesive. Obama has just let a \$1B contract to the leading private prison builder for housing undocumented immigrant families, all the while Trump getting the rhetorical attention on the immigration issue, with Clinton, never far behind, wanting her own version of The Fence. And so it goes, consensus among the three, the two major parties, and much of the American public as an harmonious sounding board, with divisiveness not on militarism and war, intervention and regime change, coups and drone assassination, but abortion, glass ceilings, and cultural politics in general, “demands” utterly absorbable so long as they do not interfere with capital accumulation, class stratification, and international confrontation and combativeness.

The world is slowly beginning to withstand the pressures of United States entitlement and delusions of grandeur, both related to a system of capitalism determined at all costs on continued growth and influence when in reality the international scene has become infinitely complex. America, Russia, China, a three-legged stool, with indigenous forces and lesser “majors” crying for a seat at the table—and in time, perhaps ultimately succeeding, to the, I think, rightful diminution of US expansionism and aggrandizement (enhancement of power, wealth, position, and reputation). Totalitarian societies do not like complexity; it makes them itchy, they cannot abide by anything less than domination. American has entered that cycle, presently alone, as the two other members of the stool have more in common with each other than either has with the US.

The Trump presidency will change little, except, and importantly, if we believe he seeks a rapprochement (establishment of cordial relations) with Putin and Russia, although thus far not thought extensible to Xi and China. If so, Trump would be deemed dispensable, a betrayal of American interests, ejected from and marginalized by the Establishment. Peaceful coexistence is ridiculed today, the inner binding force for sustainment of the Cold War and militarism pure and simple, every bit as much—even the stakes seem higher—than in the 1960s-70s. We take it for granted, “free world” et. al., having been given a good head start with the enunciation of Exceptionalism since the country's founding. Ideological cornerstones are difficult to shake loose. Always a sign of moral weakness, dressed as strength, American can expect growing resistance in a changing world, particularly since, as the election testifies, it refuses itself to change.

NOVEMBER 18, 2016

### **Evolutionary Fascism: The American Phenomenon**

Barrington Moore, in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, stated that capitalism without revolution equals fascism, implying the absence of democratization in its historical

development, that resulted in a monolithic societal formation merely recapitulating its structural-ideological features as it successively evolved. The formulation forces attention to certain aspects of capitalism particularly relevant to America, perhaps a variant of world capitalism as a framework of political economy which is systemic in character, differentiated from other systems by its commodity-structure (the separation of use value and exchange value) making for a fundamental condition of alienated labor extending throughout the society as a mental-set of still more profound separation, one from another, alienation.

America shares that condition, incorporating alienation, perhaps in more intensified form than in other capitalist societies, because it did not have a feudal past, and hence, a pre-capitalist modal stage that first had to be dismantled before capitalism proper could take off. As Louis Hartz, in *Liberal Tradition in America*, reminds us, American capitalism was born mature, no prior structural dismantlement needed, puristic capitalism standing in clarified form from the nation's historical founding—an unwavering developmental process to this day, and no doubt beyond.

No revolution, no variegation, and rather, like a steamroller effect as pertaining to class structure, social values, wealth concentration, expansion, imperialism, the resort to war and permitting internal dissent only within acceptable boundaries. Key definitions, e.g., freedom, democracy, are deductively reached and handed down, the property right, a transcendent right, at their core, shaping the legal order and ideology alike. Other capitalist societies have richer historical backgrounds. (Japan and Germany, as exceptions, have followed a straightforward monolithic course different from, but on the essential point of the absence of revolution, the same as America's, the former two culminating in fascism, America still an outcome-in-waiting.)

Why the foregoing elaboration? Because American "democracy" has been a selective historical process identical with puristic capitalism, ruling out and/or forcibly excluding whatever detracts from a linear societal growth-pattern, capitalism in extremis, as though its survival depended on its unchanging sameness. From very early, the bias has been for counterrevolution, a state of mind applicable to both domestic and foreign affairs. "Exceptionalism," a term of patriotic endearment, can and should be regarded instead as a term of indictment and disparagement, for it sweeps social change under the rug of antiradicalism. "Democracy" becomes the enemy of democratization, a means of opposing equalitarian political-social standing and equitable wealth distribution. It has been a sham ever since upper groups broke away from colonialism in the "American Revolution," only to establish their own independent mercantilist system, hardly a revolution (and when plantation slavery is factored in, the one obstacle to puristic capitalism, the consequence is a clearing away to make room for bourgeois capitalism, confirming the non-revolutionary course).

America has been stuck in its own dithers seemingly from time immemorial, fearful of revolution from below—or elsewhere in the world, endangering its own, and the system of international, capitalism, unitary in conception, despite capitalist rivalries, in that the US identifies the maximization of its national interest through posing as the guardian of the total world system. This of course has to do with the Cold War, self-conceived on America's part as a global ideological struggle by which this nation alone can, and is qualified to, lead the "free world," against malign adversaries determined to destroy its own and that world's existence in the name of communism/socialism. Anticommunism, as the historical experience of Germany and Japan attest, is the road to fascism, and in America, immediately following World War II, it had become a national religion which, since, persists at a bedrock level of national political consciousness.

Were it otherwise, even within capitalism, as in the case of the English Civil War and the French Revolution, partially if not completely wiping the slate clean of premodern elements, America could have looked forward to a democratic future. But to start as capitalist, and then become increasingly more so, cancelled all possibilities of dialectical struggle, destining the nation to be what it has, by say 1900, become: corporatist, obsessed with power to protect its wealth, ethnocentric (not only in racist terms, but also to consign labor to, by rights, a secondary position), and a political culture predicated on waste, war, and discrimination, in contradistinction—as expected of democracies—to conservation/asceticism in all their myriad forms, international peace and, at home, nonviolence and harmonious social relations, and respect for the individual without accepting a heightened caricature of individualism.

A democracy has responsibilities to its, and all, people; America, instead, quickly devolved into a class-society of extreme wealth concentration and a greater depth of impoverishment and marginality than once cares to admit. But, am I being too theoretical, in the process painting a grossly unfair and inaccurate picture? I don't believe so, and if anything, the situation is worse, because class, power, and wealth, far from being the "normal" workings of capitalism, is here hastened on, indeed, driven forward, by the military factor, an exceptionalism of force (including, through industrial warfare, from the Knights of Labor through the C.I.O., as well as in the implementation of imperialism and market expansion) rather than of freedom.

This brings us to today, an electoral contest which perfectly summarized the historical trends of the last 125 years, America at its lowest common denominator, aggressive in the world arena, contemptuous of its people at home who fail to measure up to the standards of monopoly capital and 100% Americanism (as interpreted by ruling groups and the leadership of both major parties). Now, though, the political tables are turning between Democrats and Republicans. The party of the working class has become the party of elites, the party of wealth, now taking on a plebeian identity, in both cases setting down at the starting line—already proto-fascist—for a race to the finish. It is hard to fault Trump when Clinton is equally detestable from the standpoint of war, capitalism, and inequality, so that, rather than a lesser-of-two-evils attitude, one of plague-on-both-your-houses, deserves respect.

If there is a cancer ravaging the nation, beyond what has already been mentioned, war, militarism, a saturated capitalist polity, it is the structure and spirit of privatization per se, the all-important practical and ideological connective of capitalism to the State, a Fascist State, clothed in the garments of pseudo-democracy to neutralize and win over the working class, a critical piece in the puzzle for achieving totalitarianism. The middle class, country after country, has been or is being habituated to that end, a prime carrier of fascistic belief systems, which makes of working-class militancy and self-respect all-the-more vital to democracy, itself no longer code for capitalism, as now, but a vibrant context of human rights and mutuality both of respect and purpose. As for upper groups, why look to them for guidance and leadership, when they have created and chiefly benefited from the policies which enriched them and steered the course to ever-enlarging imperialism? The main capitalist nation in the world needs all the tricks in its arsenal and at its command if it is to stay on top.

NOVEMBER 29, 2016

## **Beyond “Strangelove”: America and Nuclear War**

Trump, at this writing, is torn between Romney and Giuliani for Secretary of State, quite modest in differences over foreign policy and nuclear war, as alternatives go. Probably Giuliani, the more brash and outspoken of the two. But it doesn't matter; either one is capable, as is Trump, of an end-of-times scenario when circumstances, to each, seem appropriate. The circumstances? A cumulative build-up of fear, suspicion, ideologically rigid self-righteousness, when loss of honor (aka, no longer belief in capitalist global ascendancy, and domestically, a class-arranged hierarchical nation of working-people's subordination) replaces the will for legitimated world dominance on unilateral lines.

The problem is, the international system is perpetually evolving and does not stand still. America has shown the way to the militarization of hegemony, and the genie cannot be restored to the bottle. Conquest is in the air; America's future seemingly depends on it. I say “seemingly,” because what can arrest its lethality, comprehensive democratization of the social order, has no place in the US political economy (and perhaps never did) and its future planning.

From Clinton to Clinton, Obama to Trump, and why not go back (?), Kennedy to Reagan, Bush to Bush, America has had one unrelieved record of antiradicalism and counterrevolution, the two together reciprocally defined and operational, so that the boundaries of decision-making have left us, as with so much else, like the parched land of narrow desert bereft of human feeling and the affirmation of life itself.

Dr. Strangelove was thought an exaggeration in 1962, when it was released. Now it can be seen as a gross underestimation of the condensed hatreds boiling up, ostensibly, exclusively, from the working class, but actually characterizing America (which the bipartisan triumph of Reaction demonstrates by the recent election). Trump exposed the plebeian fascism of workers, Clinton, the more fully developed form for her supporters, with radicals now neutralized and worse, as an unstable numerically diminishing third force, sidetracked by cultural politics because taking on the combined power of business and the military appeared infeasible or somehow wrong. Old Left? New Left? Both swallowed up in the vortex of unremitting capitalism, its outer layer of public relations peeled away, only to reveal a totalitarian mindset of grubby aspirations for wealth, status, power, thinly disguised as individualism but intentionally fooling no-one.

To choose between Romney and Giuliani (or some general or admiral standing in the wings), like choosing between Clinton and Trump, makes a mockery of human choosing—an important part of freedom. Choice is denied away as too dangerous for running a social organization, and with it, rule of law, because in real or potential conflict with the security, identity, structural-ideological privilege, and accustomation, of upper groups who now rule un-self-consciously as mere entitlement, in the way, as they see it, of how the System was intended to be. On this, they may be right; capitalism was never intended for equitable wealth-distribution, unless as so defined by its elites. Why even pretend to justice and fairness when the facts speak otherwise? Inequality is the dynamic factor in the individual's capital-accumulation process, and society's war-making proclivities. It is what makes the sun rise and set for the vast majority of people in America today, whether demarcated by a white working class without a college degree, or a black community vulnerable to police brutality. Inequality is inscribed in the very process of Americanization: Learn

to bend the knee to one's betters, memorize the traits and social values which lessen the anxieties of those in a class-position above you. Provide cannon-fodder which enables the System to realize its self-defined potential, whether aggression, suzerainty, market penetration.

The present alignment of parties, with little hope of internal or external nourishment, draws a curtain around structural-economic prospects of systemic transcendence. Is that grounds for pessimism, much less paralysis? Emphatically, resoundingly NOT. When a society has its back to the wall, as I believe America has, this is no time for retreat; for now there is nothing to lose. Internment camps may lie just around the corner for all of us—undocumented immigrants already having been served notice. (And of course, whatever happens to one segment of the population can happen to others.) Trump may not be Hitler, Clinton may not be Ilsa Koch, but they both, on occasion, give a good imitation of the genuine article. Whether coming events instill fear in those who are targeted, here insinuation, targeted defamation (rather than, as practiced abroad, targeted assassination), or simply career and other forms of discrimination, the dissenter finds himself/herself under moral obligation to offer resistance: Americanization, at its finest.

DECEMBER 5, 2016

### **Taiwan: A Pustule on International Politics**

Ever since Sen. William Knowland of California, beginning in the late 1940s, advocated for Taiwan, Chiang, and the liquidation of Mao, China, more even than Russia, has been code for mounting America's most extreme reactionary policies, domestic and foreign. "The Fall of China" was a theme that vitalized the Right in America, feeding into HUAC, McCarthyism, an impetus to the larger Cold War itself—much of which had little to do with China, but served as a pretext for rolling back progressive energies and changes at home while simultaneously tilting US "defense" efforts increasingly toward global counterrevolution.

Not surprisingly, Taiwan is back in the news, not simply because of Trump's election and the now-famous congratulatory phone call from its "president," (quotation marks, because tokening an independence which plays into the larger scenario of a Chiang-like takeover of all of China, a militarized fascist formation aligned with America in the political-economic control of Asia), but because Trump is merely indicative of an accretive policy-making from the end of World War II to the present.

America has been on a joy ride for two-thirds of a century, bent on unilateral global hegemony, grabbing hold of every point of crisis, manufacturing many of them, for leverage in securing its position and resulting stabilization of a new status quo from which to go forward and expand. Cuba was America's Caribbean Taiwan, Chile, its South American, etc., on a world basis, wherever Left forces, threatening American interests, appeared. The result, at home, of this steady pressure, was a paralysis of will to democratize the American social system. The US is what it is: artificially fear-driven to promote the social regimentation of its people as the ratifying condition for channeling its national wealth into military spending. Behemoth swallows up decent universal health care in its maw, just as it does constructive environmental measures, and other long-suppressed needs of the people.



Trump presses the right ideological button: Taiwan, ergo gross maldistribution of wealth at home, internment camps for immigrants, witch-hunts, enforced patriotism, the liberation of fascistic tendencies among American workers (an unpalatable truth, their presence, for radicals to admit, but amply borne out by the election results), the whole ball of wax characterizing where the United States is presently at, including the ranks of both major parties. Perhaps a new plateau has now been reached, with no systemic-structural-ideological turning back, a platform-change from crypto-fascism toward the full realization of the genuine article.

But it is a mistake to put the onus on Trump alone: he is a creature of American historical development, the molding and shaping of monopoly capitalism from at least 1900 on. Most recently, Bill Clinton had sent the fleet into the China Sea and Barack Obama, with his Pacific-first strategy and Trans-Pacific Partnership, has made no secret (except for doubletalk about trade) of the military significance of his so called “pivot,” to isolate and confront China. One wonders if Trump is emboldened to act now because of Obama’s already putting the policy framework and war machinery in place with respect to China?

From the announcement of his key positions thus far, it would be fatuous and blind to think a striking escalation of American militarism is not underway. As trending thusly before, the US nevertheless appears to be embarking on the Great Leap; this kind of political nihilism finds war irresistible, and, contemptuous of establishment-thinking in foreign policy (as witness raising the Taiwan issue), as bad as such thinking is, Trump is demonstrating that he is capable of far worse. Dulles brinkmanship is child’s-play in his hands. The modern-day quintessential world capitalist is baring his fangs, showing what is implicit or latent in the politicization of such a system. The roles are inseparable, a moral bankruptcy whether the insatiable desire to acquire more property, or to display power and strength for their own sake.

America is being hung on its own petard of wealth, status, and quest for dominance—not for the nation as such, though done in its name, but its ruling circles, which, in addition to industrial-commercial-financial elites, must also include the military, an amalgam of power-interests already historically identified with early-to-middle stages of fascism. Taiwan, then, is more than a blip on the political-ideological radar screen. Its treatment—I’m waiting, e.g., to see Mattis and Flynn, both having Trump’s ear, in action—is a harbinger of things to come.

DECEMBER 30, 2016

### **Spectrum Shift: A Period In-Between**

America self-criminalizes, as its hegemonic ambitions further expand. The spectrum shift is not mere bipartisan circularity, as may have once been the case, but something more significant: epochal political-structural change, perhaps, in near-historical time (say two-three decades), irreversible. I mean a decisively RIGHTWARD turn, however gradual-seeming the process. The US, notwithstanding science and technology, is a textbook case of systemic atavism, a reversion to type, the type being advanced—i.e., mature—capitalism requiring its increased militarization if it is to continue to expand and show a profit. Absent the New Deal, America stands in world-historical terms in the 1930s, analogous to a late stage of Weimar Germany and Imperial Japan (its formative growth). In all three cases, 2017 America, 1933 Germany, 1931 Japan, society is on the threshold of fascism.

Paths to fascism may differ, yet one cannot hide its capitalistic inner core, ever-raised to more concentrated-consolidated proportions: monopolism, cartel-organization of business, zaibatsu. It is as though capitalism were fated to summon socialism on the global scene, leaving however a sufficient imprint on socialism as to deny its fullest humane potential, while it, capitalism, in need of constant renewal, took the next step, preparation, through business development and social-cultural regimentation, of full-scale fascism. We're there, the preparation stage, gazing blind-eyed into the abyss; where once—centuries ago, republican doctrine, mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, labor struggles—freedom was in the air, now nihilism and emptiness fill the vacuum created by essentially a permanent war doctrine, a deregulatory spirit of enterprise, cynicism over democratic values and social change.

Why capitalism? Its expansion? Its militarization? Its transmogrification from Adam Smith to Barack Obama and Donald Trump, and the country bearing witness to their election, values, record? Even under Smith and his times, moral obligation was a known factor in societal relations; no longer, when a president, and this I believe symbolizes the Obama administration, a country silently and/or indifferently looking on, engages in targeted assassination, the vaporization of humans, thousands of miles away, and his successor, Trump, is already laying down the gauntlet for world (starting with regional) conflagration and a climate at home intolerant of dissent. I submit, capitalism cannot have it any other way, if everything from surplus value, avoidance of a declining rate of profit, its modern shaking down, in America, from an industrial to a financial base (calling for more outsourcing, more intervention in the affected countries), all of which is systemically-historically re-created on a daily basis, defines so well the present course. Too, the commodification of the human being, as added insurance of—although also integral to—capitalist stability and growth, must not be overlooked.

We focus on Trump, as though eight years of Obama did not create the foundations for the latter, and before that, even in the most immediate terms (not raising the whole pattern of American capitalist development), Truman, Kennedy, Reagan, the Bushes (perhaps those also not mentioned—and definitely going back further to T. Roosevelt and Wilson) prepared the way. The period in-between, referred to above, is not the usual transition or interregnum to which we are familiar, but a deeper, more profound, more overarching historical phenomenon, the potential eclipse of democracy as we know it (even when practiced so inconsistently and falsely). At least remnants are present, as is the memory, both of which are under pressure and becoming redefined to fit America's posture in a New Cold War (the last never really having ended), a silently enveloping repression in which all of the safeguards associated with the New Deal are being undone, eliminated.

Military capitalism is transmuted into American Exceptionalism. The two form a loving couple, much as do the interpenetration of business and government. State and Capitalism, promoting one another, are becoming near-interchangeable, except that now the State is more avowedly than ever a Class-State in America, reducing government's function to that of serving as the political protector and economic stimulus of first resort as well as supplying the military muscle for geopolitical global dominance, imperialism, market penetration, the traditional nuts-and-bolts of keeping capitalism going and growing, the ledger and bayonet another consanguinity of structure and purpose. We have much to look forward to, a glance in the rearview mirror helpful to our understanding and

realization of continuity, so that a simplistic demonization of Trump, and consequent elevation of Obama and all that came before, does not cloud our vision of coming catastrophe.

At this historical-structural juncture, it is hard to see how America can escape the fate of fascism; if we are, as I think, in-between, not only is there, anyway, a thin line separating advanced capitalism from fascism (borne out earlier by Germany and Japan), but more to the point, there is insufficient will to draw back, to weigh democracy and fascism and determine to return to and reawaken the former. America is hoisted on its own petard (the explosive the case contains is an amalgam, beyond capitalism and militarism, of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, contempt for human excellence in non-invidious terms—or any terms), a seemingly free agent, yet chained to its evolving identity from early on, as private/corporatist business primacy in a nominally public state. Obama gave us Pacific-First with comprehensive naval-military support. Trump may cross the line. As US political leaders and military commanders are fond of saying, “All options are on the table.” Are we as a nation too jaded to savor the words, their meaning, their implication for ultimate destruction of the planet, and short of that, an extended interlude of fascistization of the global structure—also assisted by the nuclear arsenal and its threat of usage—under, now, American rather than German or Japanese leadership? What of socialism, can it withstand the falsification of humanitarian beliefs and convictions, its peculiar properties, in such circumstances? Fascism devours all before it. America sits at the table, with knife and fork at the ready.

JANUARY 3, 2017

### **America Deconstructed: The Great Unraveling**

From Warm Springs, the modest cottage in Georgia, where Franklin Roosevelt sought relief and rehabilitation from the rigors of poliomyelitis, to Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump’s 128-room private club and golf course in Florida, where the Nouveau Riche, the Vulgarians, gather to pleurably stew in their proto-fascistic visions and luxuriant lifestyles, marks a political-ideological journey the US historically traversed, actual and symbolic, over the last three-quarters of a century that reveals a structural descent, cumulatively unfolding, into a living hell of totalitarianism. We are getting there as a nation, from at least a formalistic democracy under the New Deal (with the capacity and will to fight world fascism) to a plutocracy—government by the wealthy—(with all stops removed to a class-state, concentrated wealth and power, the privatization of heretofore PUBLIC institutions and social-moral obligations dedicated to the people’s welfare). The eclipse of democracy, an impending decline of already weakened Constitutional principles and the rule of law, is perhaps the least of our worries, as the doctrine of permanent war, to keep capitalism *solvent*, express the spirit of Exceptionalism, and give vent to the fears of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, combine to define the contemporary mindset.

FDR was neither Pope John nor Eugene V. Debs, for corporate consolidation continued with the National Recovery Administration, but he could feel the pain and suffering of the people and he did provide structural limits to business-banking dominance of the polity, along with authentic welfare measures that restored dignity to the poor, the unemployed, youth, victims of a system of organized greed and selfishness. Donald Trump inherited that system and will fast bring it to greater perfection, inverting its teachings, however violated in previous practices, and promises to intensify its consequences in fashioning autarky (a Fortress America), international rivalry (a war-and-trade

posture, global, but with China uppermost of concern), and, not without sadistic intent and delight, strip the society of its social safety net as trigger to reducing expectations of the people of what was once termed a decent competence.

The ambience of Mar-a-Lago comes to life, contempt for the supposed inferior, who have not made their fortunes (especially through ill-gotten riches), and deservedly merit only scorn—and humiliating treatment for their alleged failures as human beings. Perhaps that might awaken them, or the more ambitious among us (for *we* are them!) to the glories and our responsibilities as 100% Americans. Patriotism is in vogue, if not embroidered with a Nazi-like banner, then still recognizable for its guttural hatred of all that challenges god, country, flag, and militarism, that which alone can cleanse our fellow countrymen of their sordid betrayal of values sanctioning a rightful hegemony, absent all traces of socialism, in international politics. American GREATNESS is code for world dominance in all areas of life; arguments to the contrary are matters of unjust defamation and internal subversion.

Why this unraveling today? That of course is simplistic. America has always been prejudiced against the poor (Newport “cottages” of 100-plus rooms a precursor of Mar-a-Lago), widely interpreted to include minorities, dissenters, radicals, whomever stands in the way—certainly, gender until recent years—of the ruling groups and capitalism per se. Simplistic, in the more important sense that Trump is merely the present culmination of long-term trends, as though American history by 1800 had not already experienced an ideological-structural scrubbing that would ensure the universality of capitalistic institutions and corresponding hierarchical valuing and arrangement of social classes. Democracy wore a false mask, *pace* the mileage and the prestige of Jeffersonianism, throughout the period of plantation slavery, and continued in racial segregation. And what held for blacks could be used as leverage against all working people: the stamp and generalization of second-class citizenship. This antidemocratic heritage has been matched, stride for stride, by imperialism, gradually enlarging in scope to embrace both foreign markets and intervention, the latter issuing in regime change, occupation, the works.

Simplistic, then, because Trump is America’s Everyman, albeit like his invitations to Mar-a-Lago, etched in gold leaf, but typical enough in the line of postwar presidencies to qualify as one who stands in a long procession building toward present-day policy. Kennedy, without first Truman and then Eisenhower, would be incomprehensible: the Cold War is already in place, and with it, anticommunism at home to bring to a focus the paranoia and compensating ethos of claiming superiority as against all others. Ditto the years of Reagan (I still see Carter as slightly off to one side) through the Bushes, until we come to Obama, who I believe has gone 90% in the direction, and hence provided the foundation, for where Trump is heading, an all but formalized Fascist State. Intervention, drone assassination, trade adventurism (TPP), CIA-JSOC regime change, the silencing of whistle-blowers—a legacy of George Patton-Joseph McCarthy quite unlike what FDR had envisioned when he presided over WPA, CCC, and later, announcement of the Four Freedoms and its implicit inclusion of all Americans.

Bipartisan fascistization has been the norm, not the exception, throughout modern US history. Business has been allowed to expand practically without limit, banking even more so, but it is the military factor that has given American capitalism its particular identity, a capitalism bent on solipsistic force-feeding, the ingestion of world power at the expense of other nations and our own people (upwards of 90% of them). Militarism and capitalism comprise a heady brew: the martial

spirit turned inward, to ensure conformity with the System as it is, and complicity with its criminal activities (as in war crimes, or more difficult to discern, legitimated violence, in which society's upper groups enjoy a privileged status, the violence practiced on those below). Bush, Clinton, Bush II, Obama, Trump, like a flight of stairs, only downward rather than upward: not a scintilla of hope that catastrophe can be avoided given the contemporary alignment of social forces. China is in the cross-hairs, but that's just for starters. Indigenous movements of protest and change are endangered throughout the globe. One-sized capitalism fits all, or had better, on pain of extinction.

Finally, don't judge Trump too harshly, unless of course one is prepared to judge his peers by the same standards as well. Obama is Trump, without the hotels! He is Cheney, without the Wyoming twang, or Bush, the Texas ranch. He is what may be termed, an ultra-imperialist statesman, using liberal cosmetics to disguise policies of repression (targeted assassination, a blip on the radar screen of evil, outweighed by policies, e.g., nuclear modernization) which can bring down the house. Trump is not thereby exempt from criticisms and responsibility; he is a distillation of American political culture (and US culture in general), rashly opinionated, inflated in self-esteem, reactionary in political-economic core beliefs, hateful of those who do not see things in the *same* way he/she does. This is the start of a bleak winter—not for ourselves alone, but for everyone on the planet, as America's destructive tendencies come more and more to the foreground. Sound bitter? No, I just despise an ever-renewed military build-up, covered up as the normalization of government and society. Capitalism once upon a time did not depend on militarism, nor militarism, on capitalism. When fused, as *now*, their integration is deadly.

JANUARY 5, 2017

### **The Trump Putsch: Trailblazing on the Right**

*"Heil, Trump!"* Sound too rash, irresponsible, outlandish? I don't think so. Inaccurate, yes, in one respect: He is not alone; the entire American political system is rotten to the core, a bipartisan agreement on Russia, China, massive surveillance, targeted assassination, veneration of wealth and the wealthy, with only peripheral differences, primarily on sociocultural issues. The much vaunted distance "across the aisle," is perhaps ten centimeters, and that only to bamboozle a public already committed to patriotism, consensus, and the generic sweep of anticommunism (now manipulated in psychic energy into channels of counterterrorism).

By that token, Heil, Obama, Heil Schumer, phrases that come less easily to the tongue, because puncturing our illusions of liberalism, progressivism, radicalism, all of which (the last a possible exception) eviscerated and cannibalized by capitalism and its increasingly boon companion and soul mate, militarism. The US is on a roller coaster plunging downward to disaster, the tracks of democracy long ago worn thin and now cracking under the strain of imperialism, heavy armaments, and counterrevolution, all of which are immediately visible in the morning's paper, the evening newscast, the conversation on the street.

Americans appear to like our accustomed place as the world guardian of exploitation and reaction, proven time and again with every intervention, saber-rattling (as in the modernization of the nuclear arsenal), regime change, embargo, retaliation for practices we ourselves have tried and perfected (as in cyberwarfare and cyberespionage), a whole gamut of fascistic measures, spirit, and

method, designed to guarantee America's unilateral dominance in world affairs, shaping global military, political, ideological, and trading patterns to our advantage.

In this, the Loyal Opposition has been anything but, Democrats from Truman onward, Kennedy a significant stride forward, Clinton, Big Man on (Totalitarian) Campus, and finally Obama, a TRAITOR to everything we foolishly came to believe about the Party and its record. A Loyal Accomplice is more like it. In particular, Obama's treachery (as in the abridgment of civil liberties, but perhaps more, the threat he posed to peace through a provocative confrontation with China) may someday be realized, but not now, when bread-and-circuses defines the age and its political climate.

What is better, a president, Congressional majority, Cabinet, and Party determined to destroy government, or the same, determined to use it, the State, in partnership with Capitalism, for purposes of more efficient profit-making, hierarchical structure of the polity, and militarization of the whole—all prettified as liberalism? At least Republicans are honest in their gut-nihilistic pursuit of wealth, desirous of stripping naked every safeguard to human well-being. Democrats take a more circuitous route to the same end. Prospects for democratic (small-d) social change shrivel as I write, a supine Left the Greek Chorus as witness to what is happening.

What is there for Democrats to defend? The Affordable Care Act was an abomination from the start, intended to prevent a single-payer system. On down the line, every cherished idea and program, gutted before they got off the ground. Even recent Cuban policy is a spider trap for American investment and takeover. The Nazis had the extermination camps; by popular agreement, America has merely extreme class-stratification and social regimentation. However, that seems no longer enough, for an ethos of humiliating the victims of American social workings is taking hold, the immigrant a surrogate for the struggling and dispossessed in general.

Bleak? Pessimistic? Only realistic, an attempt to penetrate the false consciousness which does not see before it the hate and contempt of what passes for social bonds and comity in America. Capitalistic foundations are part of the problem, an emphasis on exchange values drained of human content. But added to that is a history of discrimination, of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, which cannot be explained by capitalism alone, but must take into account its peculiar features in the American setting, starting with slavery, as touchstone for an exaggerated and self-justifying antiradicalism, to which assorted phobias (e.g., perfervid ideological rigidity) have naturally followed.

If anything, American influence will become magnified in the world, until forced to face an antithetical global system of numerous rival power blocs, at which time, the poisons stored up, a source of which is unconscious self-hatred for the mischief America has wrought, will seep out, with unimaginable consequences for future generations. Happy New Year.

JANUARY 6, 2017

### **China: Saving America From Itself**

With respect to China, Trump is Obama II. He follows in perfect continuity his predecessor's belligerence in pursuing America's thirst for permanent establishment as undisputed world hegemon, only the combined resistance of Russia and China standing in America's way of its

unilaterally defining the global political-structural-ideological-military framework in its favor, to which all other nations must—or so he believes—defer. Trump is no fool, unless of course a megalomaniacal AUTARKY—a self-sufficient and independent national economy (thank you, Webster’s, but also with the implicit, often actualized, policies and values of militarism for enforcement purposes)—is presumptive grounds of dangerous social insanity (which it is, historically, as confirmed by both World Wars in the twentieth century!).

The superficial difference in China policy between Obama and Trump, over whether or not to favor and work toward the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an Obama signature—along with his armed drone for targeted assassination—that Trump threatens to dissolve, reveals differences in levels of sophistication, but not goals as such. Each wants to cripple China’s particularly economic power so that it will not challenge US supremacy. That means an all-out geopolitical strategy of containment, isolation, and, ultimately, if not dismemberment (Taiwan’s troubled waters, clogged with troops and, in the South China Sea, carrier battle groups at the ready), then at least pressures aimed at declining Chinese strength and regional leadership. There is little to choose between Obama and Trump where it counts: alternative means to structural-ideological near-destruction (US-defined good world citizenship in obedience to America’s wishes and decisions).

In Trump’s case, an apparent liking of, and comfort with, Russia and Putin, may be less than it seems, and rather, a divide-and-conquer strategy, where uppermost is prevention of a coalition of Russia and China in resistance to America’s steadily increasing and encroaching appetite for exclusive global power. Whereas Obama has kept Russia at arm’s length, as part of a unified, supposedly new, but really continuous, Cold War, Trump peels Russia off, the better to get at China directly, a morbidity of muscle-flexing against what he realizes is America’s chief global adversary. Unlike Obama, who favors a totality of confrontation, Trump sees Russia as flaccid, lacking in will, in the final analysis, to stand up to America.

He underestimates Putin, just as he overestimates America’s military and other strengths in a multipolar world where, especially in relative terms, the US is correctly perceived as in decline, itself the tired one, torn by self-imposed demands for military supremacy at the expense of a deteriorating social safety net and crumbling infrastructure, and a consuming preoccupation with the culture wars over class, race, and gender—an emptiness of direction borne out by the essential sameness of the two political parties in their prescription for the future. In that regard, China is everything America is not. It is an ascendant world social force, as its present development projects in Africa and Latin America show, rather than ideologically trapped in a rigid ethnocentric mode. Neither Russia nor China will lie down and play dead to American ambition.

I want to be specific about China, as brought out in *The Guardian* (January 3) on the question of America’s confrontational posture. Its account, written by Benjamin Haas, in Hong Kong, differs from the above in texture and spirit, which, I believe, makes its evidence the more compelling. I may be set down as an America-basher, the *Guardian* certainly is not. Its lead, in the US briefing, under the heading, “China critic picked as Trump trade chief,” demonstrates American hostility to China beyond peradventure (not that Obama cannot match Trump stride-for-stride in this regard).

The *Guardian* states: “Longtime China critic and protectionist Robert Lighthizer, 69, has been selected as Donald Trump’s trade chief. The move indicates Trump intends to follow through on the tough stance he has threatened to take against China; Lighthizer has often advocated increasing

tariffs and called for use of the harsher methods against China.” None of this surprises, merely confirming, without exception, Trump’s appointment-designees, all of whom are pledged to the destruction of the areas, from State to EPA, they are to preside over—a muted fascistic coup d’etat if ever there was one (Obama only steps behind, typified by his Holder appointment, running roughshod over habeas corpus rights). But as for China, the appointments carry a particular viciousness (in keeping with the autarkic foundations of his presidency).

The Guardian continues: “Lighthizer will also lightly work alongside Peter Navarro, who will lead the presidential office for US trade and industrial policy.” This is the same Navarro who characterized China’s government as a “despicable, parasitic, brutal, brass-knuckled, crass, callous, amoral, ruthless and totally totalitarian imperialist power.” Nothing is left out; he qualifies as the poet laureate of the Trump regime, a post held by Ben Rhodes under Obama. And once into the body of the article, by Haas, it only gets better.

China is quite forthright in response, its paper, Global Times, writing, “May the arrogant Americans realise that the United States of America is perhaps just a shooting star in the ample sky of history.” China will not be a pushover, and a showdown is surely in the offing. Haas notes, “Trump has packed his cabinet with tycoons, vowed to renegotiate trade deals and crack down on what he says are China’s unfair policies.” As for Lighthizer, we have a thumbnail sketch of qualifications and rectitude as Washington would have it: “Lighthizer is a former Reagan-era trade official and had a previous stint in the Office of the US Trade Representative, where he travelled the world negotiating deals to curb steel imports. He then went on to a career as a trade lawyer, representing giants such as US Steel Corp working to fend off foreign imports.” (*italics, mine*)

This is what we have to look forward to, utter opportunism, conflict-of-interest philosophy and conduct, the makings of incipient fascism on behalf of American business interests, or rather, that of the mega-firms and –banks: the shining head of plutocracy, as America, not satisfied with its role and status in this respect, wants ever-more wealth, power, military might. And Trump himself deftly turns the argument away from American capitalist aggrandizement by making the worker a diversion and figurehead for this endeavor. He says, Lighthizer will “fight for good trade deals that put the American worker first,” not his first pronouncement hiding behind workers to carry out policies of wealth concentration. I give the last word to Louis Kuijs, of Oxford Economics and a former senior China economist at the World Bank: “There is almost no guessing, economic policy under Trump will become more nationalistic and more interventionist. It’s very clear their policies will be especially tough on China.”

Yes, nationalistic and interventionist equals Economic Xenophobia, a we-they dichotomy with ramifications beyond the economic, and already sharpened into the hard edge of Ideology, productive of confrontation, possible aggression, and, given the current place of nihilism in the American psyche, nuclear war. And here, Trump has not yet even taken office, although the underlying transition of power will be less shaky, more continuous, than planned high drama over policy would seem to suggest. Targeted assassination, Cold War animosities and cultural lag, militarization of American capitalism (for its own sake as well as that of capitalism’s), all will continue, with the blessings of both political parties.

Perhaps, just perhaps, China can save America from itself, this, not by turning the other cheek, but by standing up to America and forcing it to recognize the limitation to its power, in that way



inviting it to become a world citizen of good standing, shorn of counterrevolutionary zeal and respectful of the rights of other nations. To go from #1 global bully to achieving a more modest role in world politics would be like lifting a tremendous moral burden from US shoulders, one, however, not even recognized at present because of the tyrannous sway of Exceptionalism on the American mindset. America is past the point of self-rejuvenation; outside help is needed to bring us to our senses, where Obama and Trump are seen as equally undesirable alternatives. But then again, is there any sure corrective to the decay of democratic institutions since the close of World War II? Even China cannot, finally, be the good fairy-godmother; only America can save itself, and with it the world.

JANUARY 13, 2017

### **Farewell Address: Nazification of Hope**

Obama's Farewell Address in Chicago, to an enraptured audience of distilled false consciousness, prettified eight years of administrative neo-fascism, seeking popular appeal and approval while simultaneously building America's war-potential, confrontational stance toward Russia and China, and, complementing this aggressiveness to complete the picture of neo-fascism, instituting measures of massive surveillance while fostering wealth concentration and laying the foundations for still deeper structural-economic corporatism than he had already inherited from his predecessors. Prettification, at the same time engaging in the opposite, a stylish mode of repression, is in fact his hallmark trait of leadership: treachery, with a golden glow. Not surprisingly, Obama's devotion to the strategy and tactic of armed drones for targeted assassination (strategy, to strike terror from above; tactic, knowingly to commit collateral damage, to break the will of the presumed adversary) follows clearly from his geopolitical framework and design, also inherited from his predecessors, and now, passed along to his successor, of unilateral globalized political-ideological dominance. So much for folksiness. One deals here with a conniving mind, utterly closed to criticism, self- or other, vindictive when crossed or the layers of arrogance revealed.

If clues to his identity were still needed, Obama's George Washington self-image making, the proverbial Man-on-Horseback of European authoritarianism, crystallized in a presumptuous Farewell Address (to the troops? The adoring public? Claims of world statesmanship, translatable into future eminence?), completes the Great Con Artist, POTUS as grifter, charlatan, guardian of the American business system (the three interchangeable). But this is not about one person, however important the office (capable of the annihilation of humankind). America thrust Obama into a position of leadership, consistent with the entire edifice of command and decision-making since World War Two, a sequential process, not deterministic, but anchored within historical boundaries within which the Cold War was perfectly predictable. Post-1945, America had no patience or respect for alternative modes of development and modernization, and instead, a puristic capitalism that would be literally a world-beater, intolerant of social transformation carrying the promise of democratization, particularly in the Third World.

Capitalism and democracy don't mix, unless, historically, capitalism in its early stages, breaking out of feudalism, still possessed features of equalitarian wealth and power, and subjected property and the property right to the rule of law (as interpreted by a still ascendant group of social forces, non-dominative in character). Nothing could be further from the American experience. Here,

lacking feudal institutions, capitalism was born mature (the clarity of its practices, with even plantation slavery run as a business), and inceptively counterrevolutionary, including that of the American Revolution, which confirmed the place of indigenous elites in the class structure. But why go back that far, when our concern is the present-day fascistic-prone makeover of the American polity? Ammunition enough in what is seen before our eyes. Obama stands on the shoulders of Bush II, and Trump will do likewise on Obama's shoulders, sequential-historical totalitarianism inscribed in the workings of advanced capitalism, its monopolistic/concentrated features the natural confirmation—as is the whole parade of presidencies and politics—of an hierarchical social order wherein property, wealth, class, and status form the socioeconomic base of society. Obama is not Eugene V. Debs, nor would he particularly want to be.

In a long line of established practice, he, like his predecessors going back to Truman (Carter a partial exception), and no doubt more to come, beginning with Trump, has hewed to a line in which anticommunism was code for a societal configuration of reaction having little to do with communism, and a lot to do with whatever furthered the consolidation of capitalism, from political economy branching outward to an inclusive way of life. Obama personifies that trend and perfectly brought it forward, so that Trump could emerge as the blossoming American primrose, not a proto-fascist but simply one to restore American Greatness. As for Obama, he, with great agility, followed the totalitarian playbook, divert the gaze of the masses. That's all it takes, when the populace has already, for decades, been habituated to a hatred of others, and of those who do not fit nicely into the paradigm of patriotism at home. Demagoguery? Hardly, when there is a consonance of values centered on ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Whether the we-they dichotomy or the fear of the stranger, Americans are jumping through hoops of their own creation, an architecture of contemptuous treatment of all who do not measure up, as though societal cohesion depends on the Americanization even of the unconscious, much less, outward appearance.

Think about the speech, stripped down from setting and rhetorical devices, to the actual words, free from crowd manipulation. In reciting his record of achievement, there is not a word about armed drones for targeted assassination; not a word about modernizing the nuclear arsenal to create and ensure greater lethality (of, related to, or causing death); none about intervention, regime change, carrier battle groups adjacent to China; nada, deregulation, scrapping of important banking legislation, anti-monopolism a dead letter—and so the litany of abuse and betrayal goes on and on. I call the whole pattern, nazification because it integrates capitalism and the State into a structural monolith, the difference with Germany, in addition to the current degree of integration, is that in America the concentration camp and extermination chamber prove unnecessary when the people themselves provide for their self-pacification. Obama in his speech explicitly refers to a political formula that (perhaps without his knowing, given its wide currency) Theodore Roosevelt used in his first annual message (1901), to the same effect: We will go up or down together.

This masterful put-down of class consciousness in favor, instead, of class harmony, is key to trickle-down economics and the invitation to give one's allegiance to those in the higher classes, a surrender of class identity which goes a long way to explaining how upper social-economic groups encounter such little resistance and enjoy such privileges in a nominally democratic society. There is little wiggle-room for the expression of freedom and personal autonomy when the individual is crowded in between the walls of capitalism and the State, themselves doubly effective in defining the nature and areas of consent by their symbiotic relation as well as close integration. What could

be more fertile ground for the militarization, and now, growing financialization, of American capitalism? From day one, Obama brought in his team of economy-wreckers, led by Summers and Geithner, a humongous military budget to ensure a truncated social safety net, and a health-care system cowardly set forth as the best America could do, when the single-payer system was not even fought for, let alone proposed.

America's ruling groups perhaps never had a more useful and trusted ally in the White House.

Let's consider the farewell address more carefully. Patriotic exhortation, to which the speech is directed, has one purpose, to preserve existing inequalities of wealth and power, inequalities already intensified through past practices largely, since after the New Deal, carried out on a bipartisan basis. Insinuate oneself, tugging at the heartstrings, into the confidence of the people is a favorite Caesarean manipulative device from time immemorial: "...my conversations with you, the American people—in living rooms and in schools; at farms and on factory floors; at diners and on distant military outposts—those conversations are what have kept me honest, and kept me inspired, and kept me going. And every day, I have learned from you. You made me a better president, and you made me a better man." Yes, emphatically, as in using the Espionage Act to silence whistleblowers, and follow closely the advice of Brennan on national security (e.g., waterboarding) or Clapper (e.g., massive surveillance). Modesty becomes Obama, a better man than all of us, even he, realized.

Note: he is talking to the choir (my point on false consciousness), the transcript stating (CROWD CHANTING "FOUR MORE YEARS"). You can't lose with that reception. As he continues, one wouldn't know that there was a class structure in America, one in which Obama was unduly sensitive to the needs and wishes of upper groups: "Now this is where I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved, and they get engaged, and they come together to demand it. After eight years as your president, I still believe that. And it's not just my belief. It's the beating heart of our American idea—our bold experiment in self-government." With rhetorical flights like that, Exceptionalism becomes written in Scripture—nothing more is needed. Here the fusion of capitalism and democracy, again, without reference to class structure, systemic inequality, an ideology of acquisition: "What a radical idea [we the people, the instrument of our democracy] the great gift that our Founders gave to us. The freedom to chase our individual dreams through our sweat, our toil, and imagination—and the imperative to strive together as well, to achieve a common good, a greater good." What greater good than capitalism, the sweat and toil of 'Ol Man River, or other maudlin image of ingratiation rushing into view!

We mustn't be boastful and overdo: "Yes, our progress has been uneven. The work of democracy has always been hard.... But the long sweep of America has been defined by forward motion, a constant widening of our founding creed to embrace all, and not just some." Whether a nod to cultural politics, the all-inclusion theme, or just currying favor, Obama is hitting his stride. No mention of unequal wealth distribution to tarnish the image, or hate-crimes, or ominous resentments directed to the world at large; instead, we read in the transcript, (APPLAUSE). Nor does it hurt to say, as he did: "We have everything we need to meet those challenges [unspecified]. After all, we remain the wealthiest, most powerful, and most respected nation on earth [for which he is taking credit]." Ah, the appeal: "But they [the Founders] knew that democracy does require a basic sense of solidarity. The idea that, for all our outward differences, we're all in this together, that we rise or fall as one." Solidarity, uber alles.

You better believe it, for what could be rosier: “The wealthy are paying a fair share of taxes. Even as the stock market shatters records, the unemployment rate is near a ten-year low.” Modesty becometh the man: “Because that, after all, is why we serve. Not to score points or take credit. But to make people’s lives better.” Then, his one acknowledgement of reality: “While the top 1 percent has amassed a bigger share of wealth and income, too many of our families in inner cities and in rural counties have been left behind.” This might have been the introduction to a message and program of social reconstruction; instead, it is forgotten. “Now there’re no quick fixes to this long-term trend.” Indeed, the culprit here, responsible for the problem (if that is admitted), “come[s] from the relentless pace of automation that makes a lot of good middle class jobs obsolete.” Discrimination based on race, good that he mentions this, is destructive to all concerned, yet the romanticization of America continues: “And we have shown that our economy doesn’t have to be a zero-sum game. Last year, incomes rose for all races, all age groups, for men and for women.” The caution about expecting too much, too soon: “But laws alone won’t be enough. Hearts must change. It won’t change overnight. Social attitudes oftentimes take generations to change.”

Perhaps if Obama left the Situation Room on Terror Tuesdays, abandoned his hit list for authorizing the evaporation of a suspected terrorist 8,000 miles away, just perhaps one would grant his integrity about wanting to bring about greater democratization at home and peace in the world. Notwithstanding the glowing rhetoric as he brings the speech to a close, we have the same old, same old, a class society of vast cleavages in wealth, power, and status, a militarization of the total culture, and a creeping authoritarianism moving America increasingly in a rightward direction. As I noted, Trump stands on Obama’s shoulders, hard for many to imagine, yet if Obama had posed a clearer alternative, an authentic quest for democracy, Trump would have been marginalized from the outset as a kook. Instead, he is the present political Savior. As for Obama, the spirit of innovation will win out: “It is that spirit—it is that spirit born of the enlightenment that made us an economic powerhouse. The spirit that took flight at Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral” —and the political charade continues. But with a final praise for the troops: “And all who serve or have served—it has been the honor of my lifetime to be your commander-in-chief.” Farewell, Sweet Prince.

JANUARY 23, 2017

### **America: Banana Republic? Far Worse**

Before the Inauguration, one was guarded about using the term “fascist” to describe America, as if slanderous and an exaggeration. No longer. It is not entirely Trump’s doing; Obama and his predecessors were creeping up to that point with each intervention, confrontation, weakening of civil liberties, drone attack, regime change—a whole catalogue of death, defiance, destruction. But it is Trump who pulls America over the top, with the willing agreement of millions of Americans, a self-conscious, articulate mobocracy contemptuous of all who disagree with, yes, a fascist agenda.

That agenda is simple: capitalism and militarism merged, indivisible, monolithic, holding America in a death grip. Squeezing, choking, bullying: experience gained abroad, slowly taking effect at home. Root out the dissident. Empty the social safety net, so that ordinary people begin to think complicity, for fear of suffering hardship, a fusion of surveillance and foreclosure or even

penury and want of basics. The Tale of Two Cities? No, two countries, with police-state attributes riding roughshod over the people.

Through all of this, Trump poses as the quintessential Nazi-like demagogue, giving assurances to the people, celebrating their sovereignty, and meanwhile already—his policies and personality an accurate preview—turning the screws. Listen to his introduction in his speech, unashamed playing up to The Folk, to ingratiate himself with them, as, behind our backs, the Billionaires Club is busily writing and presenting their wish list: the scrapping of every decent thing a government, hostile in the first instance to the needs and aspirations of working people and the poor, has done.

Cut trillions from the Budget. Pour much of that back into armaments, the remainder into reduced taxes for America's wealthiest. Strip away whatever is deemed superfluous for the realization of Fortress America, a Behemoth with the obsession of "greatness," aka, unilateral global domination behind high protective walls. Only a complete militarization of political culture and Nation carries forward that logic: Hitler's "Strength Through Joy," a not-distant cousin. Win the people over, give them bread and circuses (chiefly rhetorical), crank up the machinery of patriotism, let the people think it is really their country, when in reality.... (Just look at the Cabinet appointments, and in the next few weeks and days, the roll back with a hatchet, not a scalpel, of social legislation.)

Here, the speech—dishonesty, flattery, a people's presidency: "rebuild our country and restore its promise for all of our people." (The trickle-down theory, with rouged cheeks.) The "orderly and peaceful transfer of power," heard ad nauseum on television, yet why not peaceful and orderly, given the continuity, my emphasis here on Obama, of bipartisan policy through administrations from at least Kennedy forward? More rightwing jive: "we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the people." Again: "Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth." A clever projection: demonize the source working hand-in-glove with plutocracy, the selfsame plutocracy Trump personifies, represents, and is determined to protect and enrich further. He speaks of "struggling families all across our land," yet is about to gut the programs making their lives bearable. This is like the Marquis de Sade politically: humiliate (the knife driven deeper by pseudo-praise) the victims of America's vast differentiations in the distribution of wealth, power, and social respect, and of course play up to those who have already evinced fascist sympathies (we are probably approaching the population half-way mark, including—shameful to say—a large number of working people).

The seeds of proto-fascism run deep, a contagion found in all classes, a shared responsibility in degradation and national shame. This is not the time to recite American history, present-day actions and attitudes tell the story, Trump being a useful summary of past and future. The USA "is your country.... [w]hat matters is...whether our government is controlled by the people." He captures the energy and momentum of the mass-man phenomenon: "You ['the forgotten men and women'] came by the tens of millions to become part of an historic movement, the likes of which the world has never seen before. At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction that a nation exists to serve its citizens." True, indeed, provided it is understood that some citizens—e.g., Morgan, Chase; Goldman, Sachs; Halliburton; Boeing, etc. etc.—are more equal than others. For Trump to have come this far, and not be laughed/booed off the platform, speaks volumes about where the nation is at: in a moral sociopolitical void.

“A righteous people and a righteous public,” collective self-flattery again, leads to the theme of Solidarity, classic fascist rhetoric, when he proclaims, “This American carnage [poverty, drugs, poor education] stops right here and stops right now. We are one nation.... We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny.” In other words, Don’t rock the boat, don’t criticize, stand united against the Outsider, whether within or without American society. No longer shall we have “the very sad depletion of our military.” [The New York Times here interpolates the surprising, for it, comment]: “The Pentagon spends about \$600 billion a year on the American military, more than is spent on the next six largest world militaries combined. Hardly a depleted force.”

There is more, worthy of Brecht’s Arturo Ui, Mel Brooks’s *The Producers*, or run-of-the-mill Hitlerian dialogue: “From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it’s going to be only America first. America first.” Those of my generation shudder at the phrase (even as a small child on the eve of World War II), its crystal-clear Nazi overtones and associations historically realized in practice, and now brought back to life. Then into an American Paean: We will be self-sufficient. We will rebuild America. “We will shine for everyone to follow.” The city on a hill has never had a greater champion, oozing with ethnocentrism and xenophobia, not to say, organized within an authoritarian framework. The best he can do, and we can turn now from the speech, is: “We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly [in both cases, not only massive surveillance, but also the Espionage Act to be used against whistleblowers], but always pursue solidarity.” Promises are meant to be fulfilled, or broken, but there is no getting around the last thought, “the pursuit of solidarity,” no fudging the fascist mindset.

My title mentions the banana republic (Webster’s, “a small dependent country; esp. one run despotically”), the last part square on the mark, but this is more serious: concentrated power to antisocial, antihuman ends, led by the unscrupulous and wealth- and power-hungry, a matrix of nihilism given a touch of glamor. Trump is for real. Militarism is for real, given special meaning and intensity by virtue of being inscribed within a fortress-like structure and mentality. Heaven help any who dare cross the United States of America.

JANUARY 24, 2017

### **Women’s March: Halt at the Water’s Edge**

The celebratory mood is over, or rather, deserves to be; it was misguided in the first place because cultural/gender politics trivializes the foundational repression of advanced capitalism, that which gives to such repression the discriminatory content and practices necessarily to be opposed if the society has any claim to being a democracy. Of course, the March was crucially important both in exposing historical abuse (measured in centuries) and shattering illusions of apathy and/or consensus in American society in the new dispensation.

But what about the old dispensation? Trump is an excrescent feature of long-standing anti-humane, anti-radical politics and social values. He may be a convenient lightning rod for current problems affecting, e.g., wealth distribution, unemployment, and a shredded social-safety net, but every rotten (I use the term advisedly –Webster’s: putrid, morally corrupt) measure on war, intervention, regime change, and a domestic climate of fear, drawing inward, undifferentiated and neurotic hate, can be found in Trump’s predecessors, starting with Obama, and going back—with minor exceptions—to Truman and Kennedy.

Face it, America is a sick society, its chief symptoms a false consciousness and unreasoning reification of capitalism as The Absolute Good, enough, when filled out, to explain the disvalue and shortcomings of this past weekend's mobilization. The New York Times (NYT) had photos of the March in American cities and throughout the world. Placards shown therein give a solid indication of the parameters of the protest. Placards don't lie; they reveal and summarize innermost demands, and on the whole, they tended to disappoint if not anger this writer. To say, as so many did in identical wording, "Women's Rights = Human Rights," is a gratifying political tautology which says, however heartfelt and earnest, next to nothing, because failing—my "halt at the water's edge" in the subtitle—to designate the power context, political economy, ideological underpinnings, of the culprit responsible for the falsification of the equation of women's rights and human rights.

You may call it capitalism; or exceptionalism; or—and I would disagree—the distortion of an otherwise sound polity of justice. But labels are less important than understanding, and here, beyond a placard of my own, "Class Over Gender," in fighting both domestic repression and international criminality, I would ask, in this time of conflict, grief, and suffering, whether control over one's womb, gender identity, or cracking the glass ceiling, has greater significance than, e.g., putting a stop to Israelis herding Gazans into UN schools and blowing them up, or armed drones used for targeted assassination, or a worldwide network of military bases, poised to implement regime change, unilateral hegemony, or provocative confrontation with Russia and China? The list can be infinitely extended, so far has America slid down the slippery pole of crypto- (and perhaps soon to be fully actualized-) fascism.

Why, therefore, at the risk of total ostracism from a radical community (one in whose membership, though scattered, somewhat mythical, entirely variegated in its composition and demands I take pride in being included) would I choose to criticize The Woman's March, knowing full well its already iconic/sacred character, and how deeply meaningful to the participants? Good question, for which the answer, as I see it, would be: It stops short of essentials, it does not go far enough, it perhaps provides ersatz relief and creates the illusion of meaningful action, but at the same time stays safe, non-subversive, not striking at the sources of wealth, power, and militarism in America, and hence, changes little, is easily assimilable, in a word, cajolable, eating out of the same feed-bag that has given us Bush, Obama, Trump, miscreants of social injustice and totalitarian international politics.

We see the development from Banana Republic (my recent CounterPunch article) to, happening right before us, Rogue State (Webster's, succinctly, adj., vicious, destructive, applied to animals), a societal process of grinding out a position of counterrevolution in all things, not least, determined opposition to, and contempt for, a doctrine of human rights which, beyond pertaining specifically to women, mobilizes, now necessarily on class terms (if that were only possible!) on behalf of fundamental equalitarianism for all human beings, achieved, again necessarily, through the democratization of social structure. What good, e.g., is gender equality (Hillary in the White House) if the social order is functionally diseased with mass poverty, authoritarian habits of deference, a positive inclination toward war, both for assisting or making possible the profitability of capitalism, and for boosting psychological confidence and well-being to compensate for an inner core of separateness, one from another, and selfishness.

Alienation makes possible false consciousness, here, an inability to generalize and then bring to fruition the more meaningful equation, democracy = humanity, both predicated on structures which

do not foster domination and repression, whether political, economic, or ideological (America ranking high on each, and maybe in that order). ‘Nuff said. I do not want to hurt the feelings of anyone involved in the March, and those at home and in other lands who identify with the marchers. Ideally, there is a rhythm to social protest, and that the weekend will lead to more. But by “more,” I mean greater substantive radicalization, and not simply further demonstrations. Transgender people suffer. Queers suffer. Gays and Lesbians suffer. The suffering is real, and is rooted in a society that cannot accept human equality and individuality.

Yet to get anywhere in the direction of a commonwealth of freedom requires looking beyond, while drawing anger and determination from, the viciousness and shabbiness of discrimination and getting down to the nitty-gritty of power, militarism, and hate. Besides, who would want cultural/gender rights if everything else about the society, from extreme wealth concentration to racism (which was not given proper attention in the March), remained the same?

JANUARY 25, 2017

### **Swastika: The Hillary-Donald Show**

The inversion of Joe Hill: don’t mourn for me, ORGANIZE. Today, more perhaps than ever, the message is clear, timely, appropriate. America is tilting so far rightward as to pose a menace to global peace. This is not Trump’s doing alone; for over a half-century US near-unilateral world dominance was being actively constructed and implemented by both major parties, with comparatively little resistance from the body politic. The Great Celebration is finally coming to an end, an international context of political-structural-economic decentralization as Russia, China, and the Third World have come into their own, nullifying America’s hegemonic claims to moral certainty and superiority.

Hence, the nervous display of ethnocentric-xenophobic power, Behemoth not giving up lightly, although the national image of Fortress America, aka, America First, strikes a responsive chord and formula for electoral success. The choice of living in the world or dominating it is painful to the largest military power in history, backed by a nuclear arsenal second to none, and fed all these years a constant diet of war, intervention, regime change, in sum, counterrevolution to hold all factors constant pertaining to American power and might—painful, but apparently, business as usual, against accommodation, the collective decision reached.

Trump works fast, prepared to shove cabinet appointments through, asserting through executive action a significant modification of trade policy, setting a tone of ultra-nationalism, but in the long wash hardly a departure from his predecessors on final goals: alternative routes to monopoly capital, the routes themselves predicated on a disposition to autarky and military strength. He works fast, yet, on close inspection, this is because the foundation for global supremacy, affording him this freedom of action, had been laid by those who came before: an unrelieved sameness of integrated domestic and foreign policy holding the world structure hostage to America’s intentions.

Wealth, whether national or individual, recognizes its own—similarly, power. When Monday (Jan. 23) labor leaders tramped to the White House, groveling at Trump’s feet, we saw the logical consequences of a movement that had lost its will, drive, and historical role as a progressive social force, accepting crumbs from the table of plutocracy. Shocking? No, because by-and-large affiliated



with the Democratic party, labor had negated and denied its class identity and position. There are no Joe Hills or Wobblies today, more likely, instead, war hawks who seek a larger share of the war pie, itself steadily enlarged to fulfill a supposed Imperial Destiny. Clinton, meanwhile, is Trump in pants suit, even more militaristic than he, banking on a nebulous tradition of social reform to carry forward a belligerence in reclaiming international leadership to the setback of the world masses.

Poor Hillary, she has had ample role models drawn from both parties—not an independent bone in her body—in shaping her outlook. Yet, given the shrunken ideological spectrum, in which a valid Left either doesn't exist or is negligible, she is currently hailed as a heroic figure wrongfully denied the presidency. If she had won, TPP and NAFTA would have gone forward, still not as the authentic democratization of capitalism, but the liberal (i.e., co-partnership of business and government, with heavy emphasis on the military) mode of wealth concentration. This liberalism is first and foremost antiradical, with national chauvinism running a close second easily channeled into uncritical patriotism.

Obama is now celebrated as a world-shaking democratic leader (this week's New Yorker lead by George Packer), a willful distortion of truth to disguise—because he is black(?)—a core posture of Reaction and the bloodless invocation of violence. He is standard operating procedure in the formulation and conduct of policy. Neither Clinton nor Trump questioned drone assassination or the suppression of dissent at home, both confident their positions would find favor or go unnoticed. Cursedly, they were right, just as policies of rendition and torture do not draw criticism, and whistleblowers are threatened with jail. Rather than take each President in turn, beginning with Truman through the likes of Kennedy, Johnson, Reagan, Bill Clinton, and the two Bushes, it is sufficient to note that continuities in foreign policy have received acceptance and accolades as the mark of wise statesmanship, as domestic policy meanwhile unrelievedly and steadily contributed to the maldistribution of wealth, spoliation of the environment, solipsistic human relations, an ethos of greed, a mindset of nirvana-like splendor and self-righteousness.

The ecstasy of Vietnam, the state of rapture in bringing crushing death to a near-helpless people, who, in fighting back, merely intensified the hatred shown them, typifies the mid-point of where we are at as a nation. Donald and Lyndon are not that far apart (if at all), a Republican and a Democrat, nor are Kennedy and Hillary, in this case, both Democrats. Nor Harry and Reagan, both specialists in Cold War intervention, again from presumably rival parties. There is plenty of ecstasy to go around, and more to come, whichever party is in power. Fortress America is not a gated community in macrocosm. The gates will stand open for the armies marching out, as the military budget threatens to dwarf all else. Civil liberties, already a casualty (did, from the start, the Democrats put up effective opposition to McCarthyism?), can only look forward to further deprivation and suspicion.

Am I too pessimistic? I can only say, prove me wrong—before it is too late. And of course, not me, but it will take tens of millions to turn the situation around. I fear that will not happen, the poisons of a false consciousness, Nazified in tenor, having become sunk too deeply over time in the American psyche. Bill, Hillary, and Barack made Trump possible by happily engaging in the process of continuity—conduct expected of Republicans, but not (although it should have been) expected of Democrats.

**JANUARY 26, 2017**

**Backfire: US and the World**

Backfire, Webster's: To have the reverse of the desired or expected effect (more familiar today, blowback, as used by Chalmers Johnson)—either way, America in a condition of overreach, an exaggerated, compulsive hegemonic demiurge, two centuries in the making and still counting.

It can't be helped. Capitalism plays mean tricks on society, integrally, when its commodity structure gives rise to alienation (Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844), and its growth imperatives give rise to imperialism, war, intervention, and social control-manipulation at home. So already, America is, in the long run, in trouble. But since the end of World War II, America has gone out of its way to court trouble and danger, to itself and the rest of the world, because of its unreasoning desire to prove itself, accelerate its power, and become the model, ideologically and structurally, for other countries, particularly those having alternative systems, to follow.

The obvious point of conflict is Russia and China, deemed perennial (if not also permanent) adversaries, a needed psychological construct to keep international politics at a boil, a war-dependent economy functioning (aka, acceptable rates of economic growth), and domestically, thoroughgoing indoctrination and regimentation with an eye to acceptance of and complicity in the values and practices of society's upper groups, themselves further differentiated into ultra-wealthy and wealthy, in command of politics, economics, and the military. Capitalism via the concentration of wealth is a class-system, and would not, despite the rhetoric of classlessness, have it otherwise. System, ideology, power, assertive leadership and acquiescent populace, in combination, even singly (though they tend to cluster), add up, fused and carried, as here, to extreme lengths, to FASCISM, incipient or full-blown, a distinction becoming less meaningful as, daily, one is evolving into the other.

Trump is only a pale replica of der Fuehrer, America's 21st-century version, so that fascism remains at a policy-stage of plutocracy and autarchy corresponding to the development of the political economy, not, at least yet, a rigid totalitarian state of concentration-camp dimensions. This does not mean that he is harmless, just as those leading up to his presidency are also not harmless, but only that the antecedent factor, capitalism with its myriad systemic requirements and traits, is the birthing context for arbitrary and aggressive rule. Here Trump is off to a good start; as I write, the focus turns from the Cold War as it presently exists to hemispheric affairs, relations with Mexico and Canada. Less significant in its own right, these relations indicate the backfire I noted, in which an Empire straining with every weapon at its command nonetheless is about to take a fall, in prestige if not still in power.

Authorization of The Wall (and its proposed method of payment, exclusively by Mexico) is sheer stupidity, among other things, counterproductive from the standpoint of advanced capitalism, and accompanied by threats regarding outsourcing and tariff penalties for reentry of US firms' products, a disaster in the making. NAFTA may be thrown out in response, and, starting a chain-reaction, affect American-Canadian relations (including Keystone XL) as well. Once the questioning of dominance in its own neighborhood begins, the boa-constrictor hold of the US in its immediate surroundings sends a clear message to others throughout the world that America is slipping badly, and that all the king's horses and all the king's nuclear armaments, standing army,

military bases, targeted assassination, doctrine of permanent war, cannot put Humpty-Dumpty together again.

The seeming minor blip on the radar screen with respect to Mexico carries the hope, at least to me, that America has to reshape its global posture fundamentally, or face ostracism, disrepute, and worse still, loss of markets and claims to unilateral world leadership. Ideology is like the falling-domino theory: the pervasive fear that give an inch, and the whole game-plan collapses. At the moment, Great-Power relations may be at a temporary standstill, but it is the other, the less powerful, not calculated initially to cause problems, that might bring Goliath down to size in a world appreciative of just that outcome, and hence, willing, in bandwagon effect, to work to that end. If there is rhyme and reason in the universe, bullying does not always win out.

Mexico, judging from preliminary reports, is ready for comprehensive negotiations on its own terms, rather than the one-sided ones proposed by Trump. But Canada is equally exciting to watch, in spite of Trudeau's feet stuck in Alberta tar sands and his disappointing appeasement of American capital. If Mexico gains substantive political and economic grounds for itself, then Canada, with or without Trudeau, is not far behind, as though a giant pincer-movement would put the squeeze on the US. If that were to happen, a wall South, a wall North, metaphorically if not actually, we would see a drastic change in international politics, either with ramifications affecting relations with China and Russia or, as sore losers, America's resort to the nuclear option.

Trump's luxury properties worldwide might give him reason to pause (one of the redeeming qualities about wealth is the tenacious desire—the obsession—to hold on to it and think twice about the conditions for its destruction), so that he is not quite the true believer—in anything. But don't hold your breath. America cannot face its own decline, and will do what is necessary to avoid it. It would be ironic if, not the rising centers of power (China and Russia), but those which have been under America's thumb, bring about its comparative downfall, an unintended consequence of the US geopolitical framework—not just ironic, but altogether moral and right.

Then and only then can America live honorably within the Family of Nations.

JANUARY 27, 2017

### **Mexico and International Politics: Autarkic Walls**

Trump wants absolute sovereignty (autarchy), not to hide behind, but to step forward (still further) into the world: the world an American colony or fiefdom, brought about through extreme militarism (is there any other form?) for purposes of political-ideological dominance AND internal social control. Herr Trump is our designated Nazi, in a business suit (preferably blue, with orange tie) than a uniform, armband, leather accessories. Berchtesgaden has been moved to Palm Beach. Membership in the Club is now doubled (fee, \$200,000) to ensure the right sort of (billionaire) folk.

That bad, with four and possibly eight years still to go (assuming the Constitution remains still in effect), after a lightning first week of inflicting what appears to be permanent damage on policy, attitudes, the very processes of government? Move quickly, Donald, create a blur of activity, and a willing populace will nod itself to sleep, as, despite the Washington March, it appears already to be doing. America is comfortable with fascism. It resonates well with its core components, a

militarization of political consciousness matched by the ever-widening differences in wealth and power. No problem about intra- and inter-capitalist struggles—the preponderant 1/10th of one percent already on your side, some of whom recruited into high government circles.

The case of Mexico is intriguing, a case study of the authoritarian mind. One does not build a 2,000 mile wall to shut down and humble a neighbor unless one is mentally (pathologically) unstuck—or is expressing the underlying wishes of the society one represents, which comes to the same thing. Mexico might as well be a mangy dog, given the message being sent out to it and the world. For Trump is looking beyond, while simultaneously addressing, Mexico. Proximity is only one matter, hegemony the more overriding concern. The fulcrum for establishing Mexico's subordination to the US, and every Third World nation in the schematic which provides for a two-tiered division of the world, very few at the top, is trade, investment, one-sided market penetration and extraction of raw materials and natural resources.

America has a gargantuan appetite; that is what makes it great and, ideally, to be feared. With Trump, all semblance of pretense is dropped: power is meant to be exercised, in this case from behind massive protective walls (the tariff a functional equivalent of keeping immigrants out). Make America Great Again, Saviors of the World, and with that head-start, go after Russia (his attachment to Putin a temporary marriage of convenience) and, more in his cross-hairs, China. Trump doesn't flinch, a rottenness of pride keeping him overextended in the willingness to use force.

Here, Mexico is a demonstration of policy, a pin cushion to serve notice on the remainder of the globe: complete surrender, or face the consequences (including nuclear blackmail). And with Mexico safely in camp, Canada offers another attractive opportunity to demonstrate political muscle, Trudeau possibly less resistant than Pena Nieto, the Alberta mindset of environmental spoliation taking over the country. Step-by-step gobbling up of countries, largely through economic means, but with military aggression always an option and held in reserve, is the pattern now, from Trump's record and pronouncements, the wave of the future. Isolationism is a mask to cover aggrandizement; an active foreign policy hardly comports with the drawing inward he alleges.

Trump has his Gauleiters, his Goebbels, Goring, and Himmler whether as individuals throughout the appointments, or as each a composite of the three when the surface is scratched, all adept at, and fully in agreement with, waterboarding, sleep deprivation, and assorted tortures, Guantanamo as well as globally situated Black Sites if not refurbished then at least dusted off and ready for occupancy. This speaks to reciprocal intimidation, whetting the appetite of the sadist: what you can do to one, you can do to all captive to your wishes. Leniency is a disease. To show such to Mexico will give subversive ideas to others. Strength, and strength alone, is the name of the game.

America and Trump are locked into a power relationship with the world that affords the US no room for backing down, nor does it wish to. The projection of world domination, from Truman (or better yet, Kennedy) to current policy is remarkably continuous, little allowance for party differences, which in any case are grossly inflated, so that to be an American now practically ensures consensus, with even the Washington March noticeably lacking in fundamental criticism of foreign policy, race deprivations, or systemic (i.e., capitalist) integral practices of wealth concentration. A Trump would have no trouble handling this range and quality of protest, as in fact

he didn't seem particularly anxious about. America is domesticated, ready for a Strong Leader, after being softened up for 2/3rds of a century along these lines at the hands of both political parties.

Paradoxically, as Mexico goes (and possibly also Canada), so goes America, the turning inward of CONTROLS over the people for the benefit of a system which itself is designed and intended for the security, prosperity, and well-being of an infinitesimally small ruling elite. Palm Beach beckons, a siren song sucking in, via lese majesty (for who will dare to oppose Sovereign Power), the working stiff, employed or unemployed, minority person, immigrant, or others (the list is growing), in the throes of false consciousness, while Tea Time is an occasion for the favored few to delight in the suffering they are causing far and wide. Palm Beach at Tea Time, ah, wonderful, good for the soul, of those certified to properly appreciate it. Perhaps at some point, Buchenwald is not far behind—for those not so-certified by whatever criteria the Trumps of this world choose to offer.

MY NYT Comment on Azam Ahmed's article, "As Trump Orders Wall, Mexico's President Considers Canceling U.S. Trip, (1-26), follows:

Pena Nieto is certainly correct in his reluctance to come to the US. Trump is an international bully, if not worse. Forget interpreting actions in terms of symbolism—actions are real, and here, in substance, fascistic, arrogant, inhumane, criminal.

It is embarrassing. No one prominent in US political life has come out in condemnation—bipartisan cowardice (or conviction, it doesn't matter, because so obviously ethnocentric and xenophobic on America's part). But why any surprise? Trump has been peddling hate-filled garbage, and Americans eat it up.

His first week in office, and already unmistakable evidence of totalitarianism—with no comparable outcry on the American side for Mexican anger and indignation. Pena Nieto should above all show resolve. This is very like the late 1930s. You could not do business with Hitler when he put pressure on Western Europe. Similarly, Trump must be resisted.

Otherwise, a process of domestic appeasement sets in—and there may be no stopping Trump's future policies. A wall is not a symbol, but a geopolitical statement. Insulting immigrants insults humanity.

There are no limits to how far this can go, in Trump's case—and now that of all Americans, from immigrants abroad to dissidents at home, McCarthyism quite likely in the offing.

The US has no-one to blame but itself. It elected the man, and his opponent had already shown latent tendencies in the same direction, with Russia and China a substitute for Mexico.

JANUARY 31, 2017

**Reichstag 1938 / Washington 2017**

We are all Muslims. Either that, or we shall be torn apart as a nation, given over to Trump-Republicans' vomit of hate for all that defines human rights and a free society. It gets worse by the minute, the immigration issue merely code for venting spleen on a whole range of issues intimately

connected with America's loss of undisputed pre-eminence to define and exclusively benefit from the world system.

Always attack the most vulnerable, if what you seek is unlimited power and acting without restraint. This strong-man complex is grounded in fear, fear of self-discovery as one whose ego (one here referring to a collective ruling group and the millions under its sway) depends on the humiliation of others to confirm one's greatness. Yes, Let's Make America Great Again, muscle flexing to prove a superiority founded on force, exploitation, the ultimate crushing of all dissent.

That takes us to the present. America occupies a forward space in what I term a pre-fascist configuration, i.e., analogous to Germany in 1938, where institutions are being rapidly made over to prepare them for a totalitarian make-over, done in the name of legality and the zeitgeist of the People. Trump is no dumbbell, although his actions may strike one that way. The quick articulation of a plan is so reminiscent of the way Hitler moved on the eve of a full-throated Nazi order. The precipice beckons. Find a scapegoat, build on the imagery of the Sainted Folk whom only the Maximum Leader can keep safe and pure.

The Leader must have loyal accolades, henchman in suits, to a person enlisted to destroy the Old for a glorious future of the New. Strut your wares, whether the stage be a massive rally, drums rolling, or a Twitter account, messages cascading out, difficult to keep up with: Fascism via the high technology of mass dissemination intended gradually to wear down the resistance of a free press. The Leader, now having a direct line to the People (aka, Folk), becomes the voice, indeed, standard, of truth, reality, social identity itself—a never-ending process first of mental and subsequently physical subjugation. Even the military is downgraded (Bannon's ascendancy without warning), making it docile to the diktat of superhuman beings bending—if that were possible—the generals (of whom there are plenty in the inner circle) to their will.

When civilians out-militarize the military, as occurred under Nazism, you know the country is on a permanent warpath. Call it counterterrorism, but the last week has shown that its true nature is as the vehicle of a power grab, a vision of regimentation of the Folk the better to conduct a business system free from all challenges to its profits and power. God is being replaced by Capitalism as the Holy of Holies, a development not a stranger to the advent of Nazism, where behind Hitler stood an advanced stage of corporatism (advanced for its time, as capitalist consolidation, particularly the financial sector, has leapt far beyond what was thought possible in 1938).

Trump's reorganization of government priorities and even structure bears clear resemblance to the Big Lie technique, be out in the open, confident, repetitive, ignore shadings, stay on message, attack always, rather than defend, never falter, lest that be interpreted as weakness. With a phalanx of billionaires behind you, and you yourself in their company, there is little to fear from outside criticism or the soon-to-be-created rabble bearing the brunt of your policies. 1938, 2017: hierarchy is in fashion, worse still, systemic. This means not only class stratification but also the basis for judging those in disrepute (beginning with the poor) inferior, an argument slipping easily into a eugenics broadside taking in ever larger numbers. Hitler understood: inferiority, so charged, is meant to be expansive and elastic, in time roping in all opponents, dissenters, those insufficiently patriotic.

Protest over the weekend at airports and public spaces is welcome and heartening; it reveals that totalitarianism is not complete. But I am waiting for the crackdown, which, judging from the present pace of events, is not far behind.

FEBRUARY 1, 2017

### **Curtain Descending: Fascistization of America**

When does a qualitative change occur in the course of a nation's history, particularly when traces of the New appear steadily and throughout in the Old? Gradualism is deceptive. We conveniently think, e.g., of the Nazi Revolution, when in Germany, especially its Bismarckian side, exhibited an authoritarian bent that led to the cartelization of capitalism, from which internal hierarchy poisoned—from a democratic standpoint—social structure, ideology, political values, the people ground down into a uniform massive congealment of consciousness. The folk, its mystical antecedents in the distant past (Wagner's creative energies did not arise in a vacuum), enveloped in fog, created a disposition to mythologize, under strong leadership, its mission in the world. Enter Hitler. If he didn't exist, he would have had to be invented.

But he did, and the 20th century would never be the same. Weimar was part holding action, part churning out the social forces of the future (despite its astonishing gifts in literature, painting, architecture, etc.). Creativity is not a sure sign of democracy. Primordial structure and political economy roll again, perverting and taking hostage of whatever they touch, everything in their grasp. Germany could not escape its destiny, nor transcend its past.

Nor could America, a lineal pattern of development founded on capitalism (the relative absence of feudalism, but the presence of plantation slavery, made over however to ensure that itself was an adjunct of capitalism) which denied from the outset the equitable distribution of wealth and power, and thus foretold a future, not unlike that of Germany: homogenization of thought feeding into its own self-serving mythology of exceptionalism and national greatness. Both the US and Germany had vital labor movements—consensus, for America, quite meaningless until following World War II, political consciousness in Germany always facing a tough uphill battle.

Analogies abound where they are not expected, the appearance (only!) of freedom in America. its at best adulterated form in Germany. A convenient test of reality in this respect would be the prevalence of MILITARISM in the respective histories/political cultures, and here both pass with flying colors, America's the more deceptive (though just as accentuated) because aligned with a "free world" (aka, entrepreneurial) mindset. Among the world's most uncomplicated and intensive capitalistic formations—what I term its purist foundations—the US, one notes, provides the ideal social laboratory for testing the salience of capitalism, whether as alienation or the consolidation of industry and banking, or, a proclivity to military advancement.

One can perhaps only guess the reasons for the historical and societal alignment of capitalism and militarism, but if not divinely attributable it is possible to trace their close relationship to a demiurge of profit maximization, intracapitalist rivalry, and, since 1917, the fear of socialism. On these counts alone, even subtracting for cultural differences, America and Germany are not that far apart. But let's leave Germany, and focus on America. (Japan, in its own way, would duplicate some of the features of the other two, particularly the genesis and mode of industrial organization.)

These preliminary observations are a way of saying, America today, under Trump, is not something new to its own internal history. We demonize Trump, when in reality he stands on the shoulders of American presidents, their parties, their policies, and their practices—in sum, government itself—going back in recognizable form to McKinley (Open Door), T. Roosevelt (battleship navy), and Wilson (liberal internationalism, i.e., antiradical global stabilization). To experience qualitative change, which I think Trump does bring on, because of its visibility and overtness, does not make light of the past, simply acknowledges the accretive details as making possible the turning of a corner long in the making. Trump is the face of capitalism approaching its undisguised capacity for inflicting harm. As a total social system we can expect more Trumps down the road, provided not interrupted by a nuclear holocaust.

The firing last night of the acting AG, the invitation to dissident State personnel to get lost, the obduracy on the immigration issue, the plutocratic underside of federal appointments, these are but straws in the wind. It can only get worse, and perhaps never better, as the Constitution becomes a freely interpreted document of political gangsterism and hatred for the “softness” of human rights. Capitalism has robbed Americans of compassion. The present crew will have it its own way, because the polity knows of no other way than showing deference to the sources of power, an elite structure combining capitalism and the state, the latter organized first and foremost to expanding the advantages of the former. Trump brings back the Social Darwinian features of the earlier capitalism (circa 1880s-90s) while projecting forward its totalitarian attributes looking to a dystopian future of further concentration, manipulation of the people, and war-provoking tendencies.

We’ve already seen these characteristics in more attenuated form (although Vietnam certified the cruelty and go-for-broke mental set energizing the momentum forward). Those looking back years from now may see in Trump the moderate or liberal fascist, so terrible what is yet, or maybe yet, to follow in his wake. All bets are now off. Let’s hear it for torture, for stripping the social safety net of significant protections, for a world of conflict (an ingrained doctrine of permanent war already on the table thanks to Obama, as a transitional figure), and for Fortress America solidified, thrown back on itself, when it becomes clear to the leadership in business and government that undisputed world dominance is no longer within reach. Plow on, Ship of State; take pride in the consistency of American capitalist development.

FEBRUARY 3, 2017

### **Inflammatory Reaction: America Veers Right**

Gorsuch’s nomination is merely an item in Trump’s remaking of the American polity in a fascist direction. This is not traditional conservatism. The fuller picture thus far is akin to a coup d’etat hiding under the name of the Constitution, Gorsuch actually less objectionable than, although perfectly consistent with, the rapid makeover of whatever vestiges remain of a democratic social order. Trump, with his foreign policy pronouncements, Cabinet selections, intimidatory, in-your-face treatment of those who disagree with him, is not merely a heavy-handed bull in a china shop, but a menace moving nation and world alike to the glorification of force, conflict, ultimately the breakdown and destruction of hard-earned human respect in modern history.

Wherever one turns, not a moment’s respite, America’s future grows darker. Bannon, Spicer, Kushner, central casting could not come up with more evil background figures, again, tip-of-the-



iceberg for the underlying structure of government and society now emerging. Years are telescoped into weeks and days, a juggernaut of compressed hatred for an interpretation of human rights grounded in equalitarian belief and practice. Instead, the valuing of repression, as in hardened attitudes to, and solutions for, immigration, the social safety net, religious toleration, characterizes a prideful consistency in defying respect for the values of justice and freedom.

The wellsprings of fascism have been tapped, a fountainhead of elitism, contaminated patriotism, self-righteous justification of class and wealth, all springing forth to liberate an underlying militarism which structuralizes hierarchy at home and globally signaling the rightful ascendance of ruling groups bound together by common understanding of—it is hard to say what, beyond their own self-interest, but surely authoritarianism drives them and explains their rise. Trump, if not yet Hitler, is Mussolini in a blue suit and tie, demagogic, ready and waiting to give orders, stage events, a one-man version of shock and awe, who thus far shows a degree of reticence compared with what he is capable of: nonstop churning out of edicts and tweets which become a substitute for government, hence, one-man rule (guided by sinister figures in the background, of whom he has chosen to listen to, rather than being manipulated by) in disregard of constitutional restraints. The State, *c'est moi*, is a landmark already passed, in the modernization of divine rule.

But why mumble about the obvious, the bold contours of a dangerous regime now in power, when it is the minute-by-minute actions that are the most telling. Firing Sally Yates is another small sign of things to come, as is each and every designee for a cabinet post, all part of ripping up democracy at its roots and starting over with the use of government against rather than for the people. Public education? Ha. Health care? Ha. Peace? Ha, to the nth power. Arrestment of climate change and environmental degradation? The litany goes on, as though the hatred and contempt for social decency have been turned on against America itself. For what is left to despoil and destroy, all for a sterile, atrophied capitalism?

Yes, capitalism, surmounting nation-state identity, has become the driving ideological force, not the elephant in the room, the room itself, which admits of no criticism. Trump is single-minded here; he knows no greater god to serve, unless it be war itself still in the service of capitalism. This is not an abstract devotion to a system, but a command structure for the rightful leaders, with commensurate rewards for their leadership. And America, as the flagship of world capitalism, entitles it to global leadership of the “free world,” no, the whole and only legitimate world. Legitimacy thrives on power, in his eyes, that of his associates and colleagues, and the millions of Americans satisfied and cheering him on. Trump has not lost his popularity. Fascism has been vindicated in the results of the election (although I would maintain, Clinton is traveling the same road at a slower pace).

In the final analysis, it is not Trump, it is the America that has put him in a position of power, that must concern us. Can it throw off the yoke of totalitarianism that makes a Trump viable? I don't mean, necessarily, revolution, but what is now beginning to happen, with more pointed demonstrations at airports and public buildings. Will Americans wake up to the present dangers of fascism? Or is it already too late? That comparatively less resistance than one would hope, particularly on the part of a Democratic party that is largely bluster before caving in, gives little grounds for hope. Fascism is neither a pleasant word, nor state of society, but signals coming out of Washington are more than threshold noise; they confirm the real thing.

## Update: Galloping Fascism

Fascism is a volatile political force. Once it has made inroads in society, it no longer crawls, but very quickly starts to gallop, feeding on itself like so many parasites hungry for contamination and power. America has just passed the take-off point, after several decades of big-business favoritism, environmental indifference, and worse—an interventionist foreign policy adopting a hard-line confrontational approach to Russia and China and ruthless military and economic treatment of Left governments while showing favoritism to Right dictatorship. All of this is a matter of long-standing record, which only the American public (blind to US unilateralism devoted to the expansion of its hegemonic capitalism) refuses to see or admit.

But now, things have gotten worse, enough so as to elicit varying responses of protest, none—as witness the Democratic party—sufficiently fundamental to address serious concerns about the totalitarian implications, both of American policy at home, a unitary package of corporatist organization, wealth concentration, and massive surveillance, and abroad, a monolithic stance of global imperialism, and the willingness to surrender democratic values in exchange for the comfort and security of strong leadership. A voluntary compliance of large numbers in fascism proper should, yet does not, seem evident. Let's start with Rex Tillerson's confirmation as Secretary of State, since the part above was written, the leadership principle, beloved by Nazism as epitomizing hierarchy, power, and the expected deference of the people, in which a leading business executive, with no experience in government (just as well), and head of the gargantuan and politically sensitive OIL company with a notorious record of foreign-affairs involvement, is presumably to guide policy in this area. I say "presumably," because Trump gives every indication of being personally committed to a Fortress-America position with grave counterrevolutionary consequences. Together, Tillerson and Trump will redefine what is permissible to discuss and act upon in foreign policy, Trump of course taking the lead. With no stone unturned in advancing capitalist interests.

As Gardner Harris writes in *The New York Times* (Feb. 1), the confirmation comes "just as serious strains have emerged with important international allies." Tillerson's appointment will not lessen the strains (mine), given his experience and narrow concern with business (and his reported six-continent dealmaking). To the politics of oil, add unilateralism and an even stronger presence in the Middle East. One problem he faces is Iran, to which the Trump people (e.g., Flynn) have already shown great hostility. Harris writes that Tillerson "struck deals with repressive governments—in at least one case, against the advice of the State Department. Environmentalists largely opposed his nomination." And then we have the refugee and immigration problems; it is unlikely he will stand up to Trump on these, nor that he would want to. It only gets worse, given Trump's ultra-nationalism, as in relations with Mexico, and his views toward the EU and, increasingly, Merkel and Germany. Fortress America and America First are reciprocally entwined, Trump's jingoism a natural seedbed for fascism.

Trump is not about politics-as-usual; he acts without constitutional restraint and with complete cynicism, knowing his opponents have not the heart to fight him (in Congress, on procedural grounds, in public, generally confined to single issues, with everything from race to foreign policy conspicuously absent). Long-term practices and guidelines are meant to be trampled, as when he directly intervened with Congress advising the Senate to adopt the "nuclear option," i.e., lower the voting threshold for approving Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, Gorsuch stamped from the same cookie cutter as Tillerson and all the other Trump clones of vitriolic conservatism. At 49, Gorsuch

will ensure a reactionary (read here, “originalist” Court for decades to come—part of Trump’s extreme makeover of a government that has already demonstrated its proto-fascist ways. For Gorsuch, abortion, euthanasia, other issues he has taken up, are code for a deeper-lying judicially retrograde philosophy not seen since Bork and going back to Stephen Field in the 19th century. The other cabinet appointments, such as DeVos, equally indicate a compulsion to destroy government in the assigned functions of their departments—a detestable lot of billionaires having no sympathy for or knowledge of working people, the poor, minorities of every description.

High-handed, usurpation-oriented, as a preview of things to come, Hatch, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, suspended the rules to approve Mnuchin and Price for Treasury and Health and Human Services, respectively, when Democrats stayed away, a preview of what to expect whenever Trump and Republicans’ absolute control is challenged. The net of ideological Reaction is spread wider and wider, from Bannon, provocateur par excellence, who is to be the public face (along with Trump) of ethnocentrism and xenophobia (his 1,000% Americanism as warrant for his contempt shown immigrants), a view of sovereignty carried to fascist heights, to—you name it, they are all coming out of the rat-infested woodwork. Bannon: “I am Thomas Cromwell in the court of the Tudors”—one who relishes and does not draw back from POWER.

And this is only Wednesday evening, well before publication date. I noted that Trump bears watching, on a minute-to-minute basis, not as though a wild man, but as dedicated (this now within reach) to a chaos of restructuring principles and values which will throw the American people into the waiting arms of a self-propelled, self-defined Strong Man we once in more innocent days called a dictator. For the present, before the veil is taken off, he is simply our POTUS.

FEBRUARY 6, 2017

### **The Golden Rule: Waterboard Trump**

The centuries-old rule of a morally just society is the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is simple, direct, to be applied to individuals, and increasingly now, policymakers, when they are in jeopardy of invalidating its ethical underpinning for the meaning of peace, equity, and yes, democracy itself. Trump is off to a good start in its extreme violation, specifically on the issue at hand, where there is no wiggle room for escape. Either you believe in torture (waterboarding, in this case) or you do not—and by calling waterboarding a form of non-torture is hardly an escape hatch from moral opprobrium.

I turn to Matthew Rosenberg’s New York Times article (Feb. 3), “Haspel, Had Leading Role in Torture,” which reports on Gina Haspel’s elevation this past week to the No. 2 slot, as deputy director, of the CIA. He writes that in 2002 she “oversaw the torture of two terrorism suspects and later took part in an order to destroy videotapes documenting their brutal interrogations at a secret prison in Thailand.” (Unlike Watergate, this is one instance where the cover-up is not worse than the crime itself.) One of the detainees, Abu Zubaydah “was waterboarded 83 times in a single month, had his head repeatedly slammed into walls and endured other harsh methods before interrogators decided he had no useful information to provide.”

This IS America, the moral nation, now on its way to Greatness, and, by his general statements, and acceptance of Haspel to such a high post, Trump’s own predilections in the matter. Despite a

presumed formal ban, torture is back in vogue, disguised as its opposite, in the desiderata of the administration, and just as presumably, in the offing, when the first opportunity is found, at one with hate-filled monstrosities of dystopian visions already present. It is not only I. who in articles in CP last week warned of where America is presently (with complicity of Democrats, in full enlistment), in the aggressive belligerence shown the world, but here is Francois Heisburg, a senior advisor to the French Foundation for Strategic Research, who said: “In the Trump world there are no sunny uplands, just darkness and hatred.”

Rosenberg points out the respect Haspel enjoys (knowing full well her record) in intelligence and government circles: “The elevation of Ms. Haspel, a veteran widely respected among her colleagues, ... was a rare public signal of how, under the Trump administration, the agency is being led by officials who appear to take a far kinder view of one of its darker chapters than their immediate predecessors.” This last was not for want of trying on the predecessors’ part, Obama never setting out to clean house at CIA, and those officials, like Clapper, who said he was “very pleased” with Haspel’s appointment, and Morell, “I applaud the appointment,” make clear as much. Thus, Rosenberg continues: “Over the past eight years, C.I.A. leaders defended dozens of agency personnel [i.e., under Obama] who had taken part in the now-banned torture program, even as they vowed [much to their consternation?—mine] never to resume the same harsh interrogation methods. But President Trump has said repeatedly that he thinks torture works.”

This is splendidly to the point, for it raises the question of the relationship between Obama and Trump. Banning torture was rather late in the day for the former, with no specific repudiations and disavowals, nor of course punishments (Obama enjoyed good relations with the CIA and the intelligence community, as in NSA’s campaign of surveillance at home, eavesdropping on foreign leaders, like Merkel, abroad). Too, how different in moral and functional equivalents is torture from Obama’s signature in counterterrorism, armed drones for targeted assassination? None that I could find, cementing both, in terms of legacies, as moral monsters. Could Trump, so early in his administration, have gotten away with this much, had not Obama provided the structure of foreign relations and contempt for the law—intervention, regime change, nuclear modernization, treatment of detainees, favoritism shown corporate wealth, all aspects of an interrelated framework of war-corporatism—that he did?

Trump, despite his earlier superficial criticism of CIA, gives away the show on essentials when he appointed Pompeo as the agency’s director, who, as the reporter notes, “has said that waterboarding and other techniques do not even constitute torture [how long the barrier remains?—mine], and praised as ‘patriots’ those who used such methods in the early days of the fight against Al Qaeda.” Where the Democrats here, laying down on the railroad tracks in silent submission? As for Haspel, “who would certainly fall within Mr. Pompeo’s description, [s]he played a direct role in the C.I.A.’s ‘extraordinary rendition program,’ under which captured militants were handed over to foreign governments and held at secret facilities, where they were tortured by agency personnel.” Much of her career was spent under Obama.

She ran the CIA’s “first overseas detention site in Thailand,” where Zubaydah was tortured, “the recordings stored in a safe” there until 2005, her “cable carrying the destruction orders”—the kind of footsie carried on by both Obama and Trump in the name of patriotism. Resistance to her promotion, comparative silence: Chris Anders, of the ACLU, was one of the few voices raised against her. Devin Nunes, chair of House Intelligence, quoted in Rosenberg, praised her as “the first

woman to serve as deputy director and said that she had ‘impressed us with her dedication, forthrightness, and her deep commitment to the intelligence community.’ So much for the vile garbage emanating from Washington, an utterly corrupt system administered by both parties. Torture is presently against the law, for how long one can only speculate.

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This raises the question, applicable to Trump and his predecessors (for he cannot be examined in a vacuum), of the connectivity in America of power, wealth, and fascism, possibly from the time of Truman onward, and certainly, from Reagan onward. I have said as much in previous CP articles, but this Haspel business drives home the point, of the darker side of US politics and government, and now, with the gathering of the clan of Billionaires under Trump, even less reason to think things will be different, from torture to the dismantlement of regulation with regard not only to corporate practice but also elementary safeguards to the nation’s health and well-being. America is fast crumbling into a boiling cauldron of hate, selfishness, and combativeness, Trump the perfect articulator, implementer, further executioner of capitalism in high spirits laboring almost gleefully under the aegis of Thanatos, an instinctual desire for death, taking on mythopoetic proportions in light of destructiveness already wrought on the world and in contemplation for the future.

FEBRUARY 7, 2017

### **Corporatism: Hemorrhaging of the Body Politic**



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Corporatism, a polite term for fascism, is specifically in my usage (not unlike what occurred in Germany, Italy, and Japan, 1925-38, before fully structuralized) the business system conjoined to the political order: a capitalist polity organized around the principle of hierarchy and a strong

leadership ethos and form. Welcome to America 2017, historically a little behind the time, for strict comparative purposes, but an antecedent preparation and buildup fully up, via business-government interpenetration (with more recently a militaristic component), to the definition. As I've written before in these pages this is not the single-minded "achievement" of Trump, but summarizes ideological and systemic trends in America since the late 1800s, chiefly, borne out in the concentration of wealth and power, rapidly accelerating, on a bipartisan basis since 1945.

We are there now. Analytically, sometimes the microscopic level best helps to understand the macroscopic, in this case, Trump's meeting at the White House last Friday (2-3) with CEOs of various major corporations, the purpose, to assure them that regulations will be significantly reduced (already a step, when realized, far on the way to satisfying the meaning of fascism). The emphasis was on regulations affecting the financial system, itself a prioritization fraught with meaning about the nature and complexity of US capitalist development, a chosen pathway to the control of the world economy without force-feeding industrialism in gaining entrance to global markets. Fortress America behind high protective walls is an attractive paradigm for a campaign of imperialism, market penetration, the manipulation of commercial and monetary transactions efficiently and painlessly.

But here, finance, is also a convenience, for precedent created in one area, e.g., manufacturing, can be carried over into another, political economies interrelated on such matters when it comes to essentials. Capitalism is a system, not a congeries of loosely related emphases and/or entities and forces. We can expect, then, organic ties between the micro- and macro-levels, and in the White House Conference, Trump does not disappoint. One rock-bottom goal has been to deny (and therefore destroy) the fiduciary relationship (Webster's, founded on faith or trust) between advisor and client, fund and investor, system at large and the people, a free-range capitalism predicated on anything goes, restraints, both legal and ethical, taken off the table. (Among those chosen to attend, as in the auto industry, a deep sigh of relief could be seen, as Trump made his way around the conference table, shaking hands, slapping backs—a camaraderie among actual or soon-to-be realized billionaires and their associates.)

Rescinding much of Dodd-Frank goes to the point here, legislation not exactly drawn up by John Reed or Rosa Luxemburg, yet sufficiently feared, damned, and despised by Trump's cohort that its destruction was deemed mandatory to their support and his administration's record. This includes, as the implementation of drastically weakening Dodd-Frank, doing the same, with equal glee, to dismantling much if not all of the Consumers Financial Protection Board—Elizabeth Warren one of very few standing up to Trump's harsh tactics and bulldozing. If one wanted to put a name to a face, as executor (aka henchman), to this particular area of rollback it would be Gary Cohn, formerly of Goldman, Sachs, indicative of administration recruitment.

Trump has brought monopoly capital to mainstream America. Systemic political-economic hemorrhaging (Webster's, heavy or uncontrollable bleeding) concerns corporate deregulation, but also an aggressive foreign policy, despite Trump's protestations of informed isolationism, a stripped-down America, the welfare sector cut to the bone, freeing up resources for allocation directly to defense, yielding, it now appears from his Twitters, the regimentation of dissent as an end for its own sake as well, because of his ingrained authoritarianism and because an ideal setting for rolling back the social-welfare legislation of the past. FDR is stood on his head; the capitalist polity, more broadly, is meant to arrest history.

History in the popular mind ordinarily signifies progress, further, progressive democratization of institutions of privilege, wealth, and status. No longer. America feels itself surrounded, closed in (survivalist billionaires, with their remote bunkers, pillboxes, and mountain retreats, a sign of the times), tightly coiled, and ready to strike out, paranoia as part of national character, and not only confined to Trump fanatics. War is more thinkable, once bullying ceases to have effect, in the generality of society, lest capitalist ground rules are not universally adopted, a peculiarly American mission since at least the Open Door and increasingly difficult of achievement as mixed and third-world economies come on board. The world is less suited to America today than it was in 1950 or 1970 (and even up to 2000), as unilateralism is challenged, patently, by Russia and China, yet also by a host of historical actors seeking to overthrow the influence of neocolonialism and imperialism.

Trump is the ideal candidate for resistance to these forces, which is to say, ruthless, pigheaded, inept, provocatively loaded for battle in a contest that America, sure to lose, can bring the rest of the world down with it. To come full circle, does not extreme business-financial deregulation signify a nihilism, well beyond amoral cynicism, which throws fellow citizens under the bus of capitalism? Not a blush, not a tear; it had to be done if the system was or is to realize its full potential as a wealth-producing machine for the very rich. This is naked accumulation far exceeding the needs of a trickle-down theory or framework. It is more blunt: Get out of my way. That is why war is more thinkable today, if not inevitable.

FEBRUARY 17, 2017

### **Self-Devouring Reaction: Governmental Impasse**



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Fascism commends itself on its self-evidence (to its adherents) and its tidiness (making the trains run on time), a mental frame which harnesses the cult of action to a certitude of belief that translates into authoritarian submissiveness. How else explain what is happening in America today? We have billionaires floating around and in government who we did not know existed and who seemed

pulled out of a rabbit's hole of gut-level extremism heretofore always present but under wraps waiting for its day in the sun.

We are still at sunrise, after a predawn setting, under Liberal/Democratic auspices, which already created the conditions for its breaking surface in a new day. There could not be Trump, if there were not, first, Obama, and there could not be Obama, if there were not first the continuity of predecessors, bipartisan, single-minded, dating back half-a-century. Trump is not happenstance; he is as American as apple pie.

Take for example his invitation to Stephen Feinberg to review United States intelligence agencies, with his possible appointment as director of one. An incestuous process at first glance, it is actually a still more rightward shift of mainstream government, with Republicans goading him on, and Democrats largely marginalized, shooting arrows at hardcore nutcakes ordinarily beneath contempt. Yet in present-day America, to be a billionaire is certification of competence, (nonexistent) prior public service, patriotism (the single word driving a state of false consciousness, and yes, America's own Nazification), and mood of hardening ideology.

Feinberg is the co-partner in Cerebus Management, a fund unerringly pointed in the direction of America's fascistic underpinnings, from heavy investment in defense industries to covert counterrevolutionary forces. That he and Trump would go public with such a record speaks volumes about the prideful assertion of what had once been publicly unsuitable and almost beyond the pale. But there he is in full display (as are the others around Trump: take your pick, Bannon?), no apologies, on the contrary, bulldozing straight ahead.

Once, from the standard of structural analysis, the interpenetration between business and government, a unification of two modern spheres of authority, capitalism and the state, was adequate to the definition, as found in late stages of Weimar, and corresponding stages in Japan and Italy. With internal regimentation and the outpouring of militaristic expansion, matched by, or even preceded by, the concentration camp and gas chamber, the definition was seen as too simple. That in fact history was in the throes of civilizational upheaval, capitalism a driving force, even within itself, of world conflict. (Neither Russia nor China has evinced the staying power to be a viable challenge in determining the global order.)

Under Trump, American world ascendance is proving catastrophic, a frenzied feeding in search of still greater power: America First, as our neo-Nazis of the late 30s would have understood and appreciated the phrase, has come to signify a solipsistic national universe, unilateral in its power surge, that, perhaps without need of the concentration camp, will produce the same result, passivity, marginality, of the people below. Trump, Feinberg, Mattis, Bannon, make even the CIA look good. The rehabilitation of Obama is rapidly underway, if that was ever in doubt. In sum, there is no governmental impasse, only the next step in the uphill slog to greater supremacy.



FEBRUARY 20, 2017

### **Fascistization Crashing Down: Driving the Cleaver into Social Welfare**

Trump is Hitler with golden locks. Skip the polite discourse, this is the real thing. We've already seen in one short month what the future holds in store: the going after social decency as a nation with a vengeance, a gutting of all that signifies a democratic society and its possibilities.

Here let's focus on one segment of the record, the nitty-gritty of domestic humiliation and continued suffering of the poor. Mike Mulvaney, an obsessed, pathological cutter of social spending, was confirmed last Thursday as White House budget director (with little fight from the Democrats, a now familiar pattern, under Schumer, of compromise and complicity with the most retrograde forces seen in decades). Targeted for elimination right off the bat are the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Legal Services Corporation, AmeriCorps, and the National Endowment for the Arts and the Humanities—these for starters, and presumably symbolic to the Right of godless communism intended to brainwash America, and worse, detract from rising military budgets.

When one goes below the surface, to more gutting of social priorities, a naked Capitalist State is fast surfacing from the carnage, the rise of a narrowly based, hierarchical, billionaire-directed political order. This is not a nameless, undetected development, Stephen Miller, Paul Winfree, Peter Navarro, in addition to Mulvaney, all leading the charge in this one tight area. And that is but the tip of the iceberg—Black Shirts underneath pin-striped navy business suits. Cruelty is built-into the selection process, raw hatred of and contempt for the poor, such as the proposed scrapping of the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation.

Fix upon the construction of a massive class state, precisely at a time when the world cries out for the eradication of poverty, misery, needless death, all following from current policy, by design, malicious to the extreme. Throw Peter Navarro into the mix, with the National Trade Council, and you find the bridge to Bannon and the nationalistic power-crazies making the Trump presidency a unified expression of fascism pure and simple, no redeeming features. The ax swings wide, such as destroying—despite protestations of antidrug policies—the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Cut, cut, cut, wherever sanity once reigned. All of this, as I noted, is simultaneous with the planned enlargement of the military—military foundations of a class order with dictatorial ambitions for shaping the global system.

Scapegoats follow. China is the new Russia, where anything goes for the sake of confrontation. Restricting imports is less for its own sake, whether with respect to China or elsewhere, than the mood of subservience to be inculcated into the populace under the leadership of an army of CEOs floating their corporate banners into the NEW DAY, one where every nation will fear an omnivorous, all-mighty United States of America. All hail mighty Caesar.

FEBRUARY 22, 2017

### **Mar-a-Lago, Ideological Refuge: Berchtesgaden, II**

Sometimes symbolism rings a bell that straight non-fiction cannot, and where humor, as in Mel Brook's "The Producers," approaches the unmentionable and provides some sense of release or comfort. Such is the case here, Mar-a-Lago. Trump's Southern White House, in Palm Beach, is a

veritable termitarium (a termites' nest) of extreme, and heretofore somewhat concealed, wealth that is now coming out of the woodwork.

We owe to Trump what Veblen, C. Wright Mills, and countless radical critics of America's class-and-power system, had not successfully revealed: the raw guts of oligarchy, with accompanying authoritarian values, always in process of formation and taking cohesive form by, say, the early 1950s, a period coinciding with commencement of the Cold War in earnest. (War, hot or cold, is an ideal setting for, and helps to reinforce, the process of wealth concentration.) This is not a matter of simple political confrontation at a particular stage of global imperialism.

Rather, America's ascendance occurs, of course, in the changing environment of world revolution, with Russia and China as vanguard socialist political economies (and Third World nations industrializing and seeking common ground) over what was and still is perceived as ideological differences (even with the evisceration of Russian and Chinese socialism). Instead of intracapitalist imperialism, in the aftermath of World War II America defined a new stage of imperialism through adopting a global counterrevolutionary posture, applicable to capitalism and socialism alike: a march against history itself. America was in the game of unilateral capitalist world dominance, itself in this process nothing less than pre-eminent, from the start and here on out.

Yet Mel Brooks notwithstanding, this is no laughing matter, indeed, just as Trump is not your garden-variety would-be dictator who surfaces every generation or so, as in a figure out of Sinclair Lewis or Robert Penn Warren. He is the genuine article, not only in his own right but what he brings to the table: haute capital, brazen, claiming its alleged due of decision-making rights, prescriptively tuned to war, aggression, hegemony.

Brooks's SS-lovelies, dancing in black leather (as seen in the overhead shot) in swastika formation, is a scene that is no match for reality, each announcement from Washington signaling the further dismantlement of democratic government, leaving the people vulnerable, unprotected, ripe for exploitation. The result, under the mantra of privatization as an absolute good (and token of liberty), is a Nazi polity in pseudo-Jeffersonian garb. That is, the announced purpose is to reduce, to the point of destruction, a viable public sector by cutting government—except for the military—to the bone.

Mar-a-Lago, both as symbol and fact, nicely summarizes where, with Trump's election, the nation is at. His election is not determinative per se, only that, because it happened, it reveals the state of mind which indicates the American predisposition to fascism. (What else could such an election signify, even rejecting Hillary Clinton, Cold Warrior, servant of Wall Street, par excellence, as insufficiently reactionary and no real match for Trump?)

Whether confirmatory, aspirational, or still latent, this fascistic identity, pushing outward now from domestic to foreign policy, has been a long-term trend beginning with the crystallization of industrial wealth, the gradual filling out of finance capitalism, and a more assertive foreign policy, all in the generation after the Civil War. By World War I and the attempted conquest of the Russian Revolution, The Donald could already be perceived in the distance, as only a matter of time.

Mar-a-Lago in itself is hardly new, a gathering place for industrial and financial wealth to be placed historically alongside Bar Harbor, White Sulphur Springs, and other enclaves, watering holes, etc., nor is it even now a centralized locus of wealth in America. It is not central HQ for a

unified, necessarily tightly cohesive, ruling group, itself not having yet shaken down to such an outcome. But it is a microcosm of the future.

Currently, as in some examples given below, it reflects the middle stratum, members, guests, visitors, of extreme wealth and upper-class formation, those, mostly active, near the top of megapower, with cross-sectional flow of visitation rights and consanguineous relations directed to incorporating the American military into the power structure. Wealth concerns class dominance; its militarization concerns fascism.

I do not denigrate the majesty of haute capitalism in my focus here on the middle stratum of the top tier of societal wealth and power, for it is from these ranks that further cohesion and cementing of identity occurs. Trump embodies the structural process at work, and he has already entered the danger zone of, if not irreversible social change, then at least an accelerated trend toward a totalitarianism difficult by this point to dislodge. Meanwhile, Democrats (and radicals, as well) are left picking daisies in a field of dreams, dreams already being nudged rightward through decades-old pressures of Reaction.

Here I draw on an excellent article (so far as it goes) in *The Times* (2-19) by Nicholas Confessore, Maggie Haberman, and Eric Lipton, “A Look at Mar-a-Lago’s Members, With a Front-Row Seat to History,” the latter an unwitting testimony to the qualitative change occurring in America today, and still opposed by Democrats in conventional political terms, rather than, as needed, unceremonious opposition to the grave danger facing the Republic. Chuck Schumer may be cardboard opposition, to be steamrolled over just as were Hitler’s critics during Weimar and subsequently. He is not alone in this regard.

The scene is idyllic, Kushner, “by the beachside soft-service ice cream machine,” Bannon, “on the dining patio,” while Trump “could stop by your table for a quick chat.” However, “you will have to pay \$200,000 for the privilege [of the chat]—and the few available spots are going fast.” Why the hefty entrance fee (not including annual dues)? Wealth attracts wealth and the window is opened, cocktails and dancing for assured background of worthiness and respectability, to one-on-one influence peddling (a phrase once derived from a slightly more innocent time, a hegemonic class structure not yet in place or getting there).

Yes, idyllic, free from riff-raff (aka radicals) where negotiation is only less important than the identity of the negotiators—a burgeoning class of Billionaires stamped essentially from the same mold and holding the same outlook. “Virtually overnight,” here Trump “has entertained a foreign head of state [PM Abe], health care industry executives and other presidential guests”—and this, only into the first four weeks of his presidency.

The reporters are not reticent in their description (plutocracy and conflict of interest are not mentioned explicitly but patently obvious): “Trump’s gatherings ... have also created an arena for potential political influence rarely seen in American history: a kind of Washington steakhouse on steroids, situated in a sunny playground of the rich and powerful, where members and their guests enjoy a level of access that could elude even the best-connected of lobbyists.”

In fact, we are beyond the level of lobbyists as though an unnecessary intermediate level, when, as the mark of the new cohesion forming at the top, wealth can talk face-to-face to itself, shorn of all sense of wrongdoing, sordidness, or illegality. Fascism is thereby made to appear respectable,

the advantage of a common setting, in which the State and Capitalism have become integrated, and a mature site for the reception of the military factor as an essential component of the whole.

Who's around this past weekend, according to the news report? In addition to the retinue Trump has already gathered, an influential elite from family (nepotism?) and bureaucratic appointments (approved and prospective), there were undoubtedly present, drawn from "the club's nearly 500 paying members," an assortment that includes "dozens of real estate developers, Wall Street financiers, energy executives [a growing center of power and interest in the administration] and others whose businesses could be affected by [and could affect] Mr. Trump's policies."

This by itself does not constitute a ruling group, but centripetal forces are at work to winnow down the chaff (wannabe Trump developers) and provide through the consolidation process a strategic core of power-wielders, especially as from such decisive areas as defense and energy, capable of defining the makings of a ruling class attuned and inclined to the need and desirability for a fascist polity. I didn't call the roll, so some may have been elsewhere, but I note Koch, "who oversees a major mining and fuels company," and—a new one to me—"the billionaire trader Thomas Peterffy, who spent more than \$8 million on political ads in 2012 warning of creeping socialism in America."

Then there is Janet Weiner, "part owner and chief financial officer of the Rockstar energy drink company, which has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying federal officials to avoid tighter regulations on its products." Nothing sinister here, just business as usual, a glimpse of which can be seen in the interview of Trump's son, Eric, who "rejected suggestions that his family was offering access to his father and profiting from it. First, he said, only 20 to 40 new members are admitted per year, and second, the wealthy business executives who frequent the club, among others, have many ways to communicate with the federal government if they want to."

Eric is right, for that is a useful description of the interpenetration of business and government, except that now two-way access is greatly facilitated, accelerated, and structuralized, already seen in the Trump presidency and its Cabinet selections (and Supreme Court nominee, a self-admitted junior Scalia), intentionally chosen to destroy the workings of the departments they will be administering. Conflicts of interest? Impossible in the new dispensation, for as Hope Hicks, a White House spokesperson, explains, "federal law exempts [the president] from provisions prohibiting federal employees from taking actions that could benefit themselves financially." POTUS, in sum, is above, or rather is, the law.

And like Eric, she, too, is right. Personal enrichment, for Trump, is small potatoes in a position such as this; for now he can dedicate himself to the ideological construction and defense of a systemic framework of wealth aggrandizement. (Opponents, regrettably, still focus more on his personal enrichment through worldwide holdings, than on the harm he can do in the transmogrification of the American polity.) This is not government as we once knew it; Mar-a-Lago is a private preserve of vested wealth: "But unlike the real White House, it has no public access, and no official visitor log is available." The press corps covering Trump "were housed during part of the trip in a room whose windows had been covered with black plastic."

Perhaps soon, the entire nation will be covered in black plastic. For the elite, which pretty much defines the membership, this does not apply, and a camaraderie prevails in which the president "might seek guidance on a major government project the way another New Yorker might ask

around for a good orthopedist.” Such is the community of wealth and friendship drawing together. Berchtesgaden? I may exaggerate for now, but it may also be a matter of time before its full consummation. Fascism, American style, does not have to replicate the German model, accomplishing the internalization of restraint and obedience of society as a whole, instead, through other means, such as the projection of an enemy inside or outside the gates. What is certain is that democracy presently is not putting up much of a fight.

FEBRUARY 24, 2017

### **Drumbeat of Fascism: Find, Arrest, Deport**

Tuesday (2-21-17) was a black day in US history, conflicted in a time sense, reverting back to the antiradical/anti-immigrant somewhat contrived and organized hysteria of A. Mitchell Palmer at the time of World War One (the notorious Red Raids), and projecting forward to recognizable systemic-psychological traits of authoritarianism enveloped by and serving to define a receptive political culture, long-standing historically and now rapidly maturing in form and more lethal in content. You ain’t seen nothing yet. The foregoing dynamic is only seemingly conflicted. Faced in both directions America in fact expresses a unity or unitary historical-structural development, focused on pre-eminence in the capitalist world, counterrevolution as to the remainder. What has changed over time is America’s greater omnipotence, as military complement industrial, financial, and commercial factors at the expense—given its unilateralism—of other capitalist, socialist, and Third World political economies.

The immigrant is the convenient, easily recognizable target for the remaking of America. It does not require Freud to see the psychodynamics at play here, a generic scapegoat which validates the idea and reality of internal societal division, itself corresponding to hierarchical class-and-power arrangements in the context of interpenetrated frameworks of business and government and the concentration of wealth. What you can do to the immigrant you can do to everyone else, a metaphorical framework of the mind in which leverage is created for achieving separation in all things where ethnocentrism and xenophobia reign. He/she is all of us, absent government, capitalist, military elites who to some degree owe their differentiation from the populace because of the psychodynamics: no greater example of respect for wealth, power, and status than the American, objectively light years outside of ruling circles because of a false consciousness grounded in the workings of capitalist alienation. Upper groups have long won the ideological battle of social legitimacy.

Elites, in a unitary structural paradigm, do not as a rule inhabit separate universes of activity, and rather, as now, gain greater coherence (both as structures—political, economic, social—merge at the top, and common patterns of belief emerge) as a new ruling group, or better, ruling class with demonstrably fascist proclivities. Cutting to the chase, I have in mind by way of explanation the excellent New York Times article by Michael Shear and Ron Nixon, “Trump Details Plans to Deport Millions of Immigrants” (2-21), which, because so neutrally-worded, is the more powerful—if unintended—indictment of current thinking and future action. Trump was not the product of a coup; he had, and still has, significant support at home to indicate that what The Times describes reveals a degree of public complicity on the immigration issue (the article had a second

title inside the paper, “New Trump Deportation Rules Allow Far More Expulsions”) which, as “expulsion” implies, is anything but democratic.

The reporters’ opening sentence says it all: “President Trump has directed his administration to enforce the nation’s immigration laws more aggressively, unleashing the full force of the federal government to find, arrest and deport those in the country illegally, regardless of whether they have committed serious crimes.” Right off the bat we find that aggressive enforcement shall be more inclusive of coverage (any pretext will do, like minor infractions of the law, to start the deportation process) and punitive in execution. As for the full force of the federal government, this makes viable—integral to the machinery and spirit of enforcement—a trickle-down fabric of authority, in which state and local government units are directly involved in the overall process (extremely important, as cities declare themselves sanctuaries, greater opportunities for conflict arise, and the manifest injustice of the policy is recognized). But more, deportation/expulsion does not hinge on the seriousness of the alleged offense, and already there is discussion that no offense is necessary if the official sees or claims to see a threat to public safety.

The sentence which follows in the article fairly bursts with the entertainment of fascist thought on a sweeping basis: “Documents released on Tuesday [2-21] by the Department of Homeland Security revealed the broad scope of the president’s ambitions: to publicize crimes by undocumented immigrants; strip such immigrants of privacy protections; enlist local police officers as enforcers; erect new detention facilities; discourage asylum seekers; and, ultimately, speed up deportations.” Ordinarily, verbatim quotations are not necessary (the reader can go to the source himself/herself), but this succinct summary, itself only scratching the surface, is useful in showing how vulnerable the individual has become, and institutions falsified and/or prostituted in the process. Cast the immigrant in a pejorative light, deny privacy considerations and, really, the rule of law to the immigrant, and to me most chilling of all for what it portends, rising reference to detention centers (already figuring in the budgetary plans). And of course, build a self-willed Iron Wall or Curtain to exclude asylum seekers and speed up deportations, here and above a collective schema verging on fascism.

So much of the Trump Phenomenon was clearly communicated to the American electorate, thus affording little opportunity for passing the buck. The US, on the part of both major party’s candidates, signaled substantial agreement on suppression at home, hegemony abroad, with Trump the more articulate (and less politic) of the two, as when in the campaign he treated immigrants as “criminal aliens” and projected fears of rapists as gathering at the border for indiscriminate and horrific home invasion. The climate of repression, coming so early in the functioning of the departments and agencies and the administration itself, a warning of what to expect, can be seen in the statement of John Kelly, secretary of homeland security (quoted by the reporters), “The faithful execution of our immigration laws is best achieved by using all these statutory authorities to the greatest extent practicable. Accordingly, department personnel shall make full use of these authorities.” Aside from the military slant Kelly brings to DHS, what we are seeing already is the increasing prominence accorded to the department, thereby keeping the immigrant at the forefront of the policy context and what that means for publicly-sanctioned nativism and authoritarianism.

Spicer, White House press secretary, noting that Trump wanted to “take the shackles off” the immigration authorities, stated on the 21st that among the new policies “the No. 1 priority is that people who pose a threat to our country are immediately dealt with,” now the immigrant, but who

knows what next. Inculcating fear and hostility into the body politic obviously invites fast and loose treatment of the rule of law, Trump, surrounded by generals and admirals in high government positions, already is reaching beyond the constitutional parameters of presidential powers. My criticism of Obama—in this case, for initiating or extending Clinton and Bush II programs anti-civil libertarian in nature—still on immigrants is discriminably better off than Trump in that he reserved deportation for serious crimes, whereas Trump, according to Shear and Nixon, has directed enforcement officials “to seek the deportation of anyone in the country illegally.”

The nerve center in all of this appears to be Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a part of DHS, which, following Trump’s announced intention, is embarked on what could be (if not already is) an inclusive stance on deportation, however flimsy the grounds. A DHS fact sheet states, “Under this executive order, ICE will not exempt classes or categories of removal aliens from potential enforcement. All of those present in violation of the immigration laws may be subject to immigration arrest, detention, and, if found removable by final order, removed from the United States.” To expulsion and deportation, add removal; not surprisingly, the reporters observe, “The policy also expands a program that lets officials bypass due process protections such as court hearings in some deportation cases.” Wave of the future? Here we see the possibility for creating a precedent (actually the long-term trend in any case) that weakens due process protections in other areas as well, so greatly is the thrust of law and government alike to that end.

New detention facilities are integral to the anti-immigrant project; so, too, is rule 287(g), which gives ICE the power to penetrate downward into the social system, as part of the great chain of repression. There are few if any bright spots on the horizon. The utility of emphasizing policies toward and the treatment of the immigrant is that one’s analytic perspective is not distorted by the multiplicity of issues already arising. A toehold must be established somewhere to criticize the stage of history we have just entered; symbolically, drone assassination symbolized if not personified Obama’s presidency (along with individual and corporate wealth concentration); for Trump, in just a few weeks, we have become acquainted with the underside of totalitarianism, the breakdown of the human personality, accompanied by the further breakdown of social justice and the implied social contract which makes life worth living. Cynicism, contempt for democratic government, lies, conscious or not, are not the seedbed of human freedom. Let all of us become the immigrant and stand up, in anticipation, to fascism, whether still inchoate or latent. The clouds are darkening: Trump is symptomatic of deeper forces rooting out rights long thought inviolable, yet now, under pressure, shown to be fragile (again, the immigrant) and in need of sustainment.

FEBRUARY 27, 2017

## Political Castration of State: Militarization of Government



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Poor Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State, presiding over what had until now been the crown jewel of the president's cabinet, and reduced instead under Trump practically to a footnote on the organization charts. This appears deliberate. State historically had been identified, correctly or not, with the pursuit of peace in international relations. Actually, market penetration and the negotiation of alliances, usually with military implications and geostrategic planning, are more like it. But however involved in the dynamics of realpolitik, and hence, hardly a pacific agency as such, State nevertheless was equidistant to outright militarism, which, via the Pentagon etc., already had ample representation in government. This demotion of State (Tillerson wielded more power in foreign affairs as CEO of Exxon Mobil than presently), beneath both cabinet departments and the armed services, signifies the Rightward thrust characterizing—this early—the new administration.

State in addition to policy formation had always set the ideological tone of government. Now, no longer, on either count, a dramatic upheaval bringing America closer to a permanent state of war psychology, self-appointed to act unilaterally in the role of world leadership. Eclipse of a normalized position in power politics (disturbing as that is), in favor of guardianship of global capitalism, speaks volumes about a qualitative transformation of structural-ideological mission, counterrevolutionary in its very essence. We see, then, the projection of US power and identity into a new realm, long in maturation (start conveniently with the Alien and Sedition Acts two centuries and more ago), the pace quickening in recent years, as the 21st century expression of fascism.

Until this moment, I was satisfied, in thinking about fascism specifically as applied to America, to focus on the structural dynamics of interpenetration: the movement toward integration of business and government, which gradually disavowed government's moral obligation to serve foremost the needs and aspirations of the people, and, closing all loopholes, the perhaps more generic integration, that between capitalism and the state. The paradigm works, whether or not historical reference is made to the gas chamber and concentration camp, because a public sector has been rendered meaningless, an imposed passivity typifies the popular response, and class, wealth,



and privilege enjoy the protection of government, affording a degree of stability to the entire social order (ideally, frozen into place).

But if the paradigm of interpenetration works, it is not enough—or rather, neither brute force nor social regimentation has sufficient explanatory value in describing the fascist phenomenon, especially under Trump. (From Truman on, with greater acceleration and substance beginning with Reagan through Obama, it is more than adequate in helping to fill out the context of a co-partnership between capitalism and the state.) But something has now happened to shift the paradigm in a more aggressive direction. No, America has not discovered or re-discovered its moral soul; rather, it has politicized the moral perception into its hardened, uncompromising opposite: from moral to ideological, to foster a self-justifying imperative of hegemony. And even then, only a part of that imperative is opportunistic. Much of post-interpenetration thinking and analysis has given way to what the modern generation is loath to admit or simply doesn't see: a core of irrationality governing behavior and decision-making.

In the past, even irrationality possessed a rational guise, whether as self-interest, patriotism, or clearly articulated goals of power and conquest. Now suddenly it is as though government has become unhinged from its traditional functions and goals (however rational in appearance, the case can be made for their irrationality) and made subject to weakening lest it serve a useful purpose and thus strengthen the bonds of moral obligation. Trump is physician and patient alike, creating, as with mass deportation, or constructing the wall, a policy nightmare and then waking in a cold sweat over how to realize his policies. He feels nothing in the process which can touch his conscience (supposing it exists), but only malaise and the search for ego-inflation. If we return to Tillerson here, we have encapsulated an administration veering toward fascism, beyond the structural properties of interpenetration, to reflect an irrational component of fear masked over by certitude and the promptings of conquest.

I begin with Carol Morello and Anne Gearan's article in the Washington Post, "In first month of Trump presidency, State Department has been sidelined," 2-22-17, informative background on the re-prioritizing of government responsibilities and functions. The opening lines indicate the Department's fall from grace, including the Secretary's relative downgrading (quite unheard of, on both counts, in previous administrations, whether Hull, Acheson, Dulles, or Kerry): "The Trump administration in its first month [the time-frame is important in establishing precedents] has largely benched the State Department from its long-standing role as the preeminent voice of U.S. foreign policy, curtailing public engagement and official travel and relegating Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to a mostly offstage role."

The atmosphere of closure can be seen in the details, e.g., "the month-long lack of daily press briefings," which, since Dulles in the 1950s, had been "a fixture," and which raises the issue of "accountability" that comes from "having a government spokesman available to domestic and foreign press almost every day without fail." Too, the Secretary has "been notably absent from White House meetings with foreign leaders," here, Trudeau and Abe (even missing Netanyahu, sent off instead to Bonn for a Group 20 meeting). The impression is one of "disarray" and the sending of "mixed signals on key issues," yet, I surmise, more is involved, a sea-change itself in foreign policy wherein, the manifest creation of a partial vacuum, other departments, agencies, and military appointments stand ready, able, and willing to fill in the widening emptiness. This does not mean

that foreign policy is to be downgraded or neglected under Trump, but only that its very assertiveness is best thought left to those of proven hawkish persuasion.

Nor can the Secretary's visit, as I write, to Mexico, alter the discussion of loss of power and prestige, for timing is everything—a flaunting of superciliousness in that Tillerson arrives the day after Trump announces his plan to step up the deportation of illegal immigrants. (Kelly, of Homeland Security, has joined Tillerson on the mission.) The reporters take the easy way out, suggesting that “confusing lines of communication and authority to the White House,” rather than a power shift, helps explain State's relative—perhaps absolute—decline, and still further, in the same direction of nonstructural analysis, “Trump's inclination to farm out elements of foreign policy to a kitchen Cabinet of close advisers.” He, of course, chose those advisers and defined the boundaries of policy and discussion, a self-fulfilling framework where little is left to chance (including alleged disarray).

Indeed, Tillerson seems more a figurehead, or at best caretaker, a deliberate institutional sign of subordination in White House counsels than the customary preeminence assigned the role, still less an independent and when necessary overriding voice. On the contrary, [u]nlike in previous administrations, the State Department has not always made brief accounts [of his diplomatic] conversations public.” “So far,” Marello and Gearan write, “most of Tillerson's diplomacy has been conducted out of sight”—or perhaps not at all. After he met with EU's head of foreign policy, Federica Mogherini, “the State Department said nothing while [she] held a detailed on-the-record briefing for reporters.” He “has maintained an extremely low profile,” and even “suffered a public embarrassment just a week into the job when Trump rejected his choice of a deputy [Elliott Abrams, for which one is thankful and which shows that Tillerson is far from being a maverick] ... as insufficiently loyal to Trump.”

This penchant for anonymity, whether under orders or fitting his comfort zone, he, unlike his predecessors, “has not taken the usual complement of beat reporters with him on either of his foreign trips so far, opting instead for small ‘pools’ that send reports to others.” If this were a lesser Cabinet post, one might not notice or care. But this is State, which in Trump's own mind is thought less tractable and must be reined in, a veritable hodgepodge of paranoia on his part that is duplicated by his fear of and contempt for the press. He took to Twitter to proclaim “the news media ‘the enemy of the American people.’” Key positions in the administration may be still unfilled, even left that way until the appointee's convincing assurance of absolute loyalty to the Leader, but there is no question about the nature of the regime, a close-to-the-chest mode of governance denuding government while elevating militarism and privatization, a zesty brew preparing the way for the advent of fascism.

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I should like to explore further State's eclipse of power under Trump, using Tillerson as a case study marking the institutional pivot to a more systemic military orientation in the furtherance of America's hegemonic purposes. To complement the preceding material I turn then to the New York Times, Gardiner Harris and Kirk Semple's article, “Rex Tillerson Arrives in Mexico Facing Twin Threats to Relations,” 2-22-17, once more containing useful information about an aggressive United States policy directed to the hitherto unthinkable: massive deportations of Mexican citizens joined to the construction of a wall the length of the border between the two countries, but also a

sharpened harshness in defining commercial relations affecting trade, foreign investment, manufacturing, agricultural markets, etc., a restoration of neocolonialism without (thus far) the headache of a total breakdown in diplomatic relations, a comprehensive sanctions policy, or, perish the thought, armed intervention.

As it is, US Mexican policy—in these short weeks—has taken a qualitative turn for the worse, “twin threats” hanging over “the frayed relationship between the two nations,” i.e., “Trump’s new orders to round up and deport [illegal] immigrants,” and “a separate effort to take a hard look at all American aid to Mexico,” the threat being to use it “to pay for a border wall instead.” This is hard ball, without provocation from the other side about projected hostilities. At this moment, US officials “are required to finish calculating all the money and grants” America is providing Mexico, “a task that Mr. Trump first demanded in the executive order he signed last month directing the construction of a border wall.” Everything comes back to the wall, itself inseparable from the deportation of aliens—a policy decision from the start, and not Trump in a pique (like with the Australian PM) based on injured sensibilities. “Fortress America” was not merely a campaign shibboleth, but advanced notice of hegemonic intent, be it economic, or political, or both.

The deadline for calculating the money and grants, set in a State Department memo, did not say why the review was ordered, “[b]ut its inclusion in the executive order mandating that a wall be built,” shows, in Trump’s thinking, the linkage between “the two issues,” deportation and wall (with Mexico paying the bill). In understatement, the reporters note, “The timing adds to the deep tensions between the two countries.” Was this—the administration “calls the visit a step toward mutual understanding, a way to move the relationship forward”—a good-faith effort to bring about reconciliation? Tillerson’s arrival, with Kelly, is “only a day after the Trump administration released documents ordering a crackdown on immigration in the United States.” Nothing is meant to be achieved, the very indecisiveness of Tillerson in conducting the mission (lack of definite instructions) only rubs salt in the wound. As Harris and Semple report: “there have been few signs that [Tillerson] plays a pivotal role in setting the administration’s foreign policy agenda. He has largely been absent from important White House meetings with foreign leaders, has uttered few words in public since his confirmation and was not even allowed his choice of a top deputy [Abrams].” Muzzled? Hardly. Shy, and learning the ropes? Hardly. We see the faithful execution of policy, provocative in nature, fascistic in substance. Expulsion and walls do not make for a democratic polity.

Tillerson’s assignment is “to tidy up the confrontations” Trump has had “with longtime allies” [as with Mexico, deeper and more far-reaching than that], as for example, his visit to Germany “to reassure his counterparts that Mr. Trump valued” NATO and the EU, despite his statements to the contrary. The reporters acknowledge, however, that Trump’s “rift with Mexico is not only deeper, but also is likely to worsen.” For Mexicans, “the meetings will be an important step toward deciding whether to battle or appease an administration that has consistently excoriated their country.” Rapists at the border crashing in—an altogether unsavory portrayal to which Harris and Semple, not to say Trump, might recur as a reminder of the latter’s depth of hostility (also his quick-trigger pronouncements). Like Mexico, Japan and China, with Trump’s extreme nativism, have to decide whether to battle or appease the administration, although the situation does not appear as dire.

Trump is playing with fire. Mexicans use “a combination of outreach and complaint that has so far proved ineffective, as the twin blows [deportation and provision for the wall] this week

demonstrated.” The Merida Initiative, “a bilateral partnership begun in 2007,” provides \$1B in unallocated funds for focusing on “fighting organized criminal groups, re-engineering the judicial system, modernizing the border between the two countries,” etc., a diversion of which, spiteful and punitive at best, may hurt both countries, nonetheless is seen as the application of real pressure for Mexico to comply with Trump’s initiatives. Even then, Trump is adamant that Mexico pay for the wall, and, hiring 10,000 new border personnel, that deportation be done on a vast scale. This also hurts (more perhaps than a boycott or blockade) in that the deportation, beyond a living human tragedy, of millions of Mexicans from the US affects what happens at home: Those with “settled lives and jobs” in America “provide most of the nearly \$25 billion in remittance payments to Mexican families each year.” Suffering seems of little consequence in Washington, even though a next-door neighbor. I’ll let Luis Videgar, Mexico’s foreign minister, have the last word. He said, on 2-22, “I want to make clear, and in the most emphatic way, that the Mexican government and the Mexican people do not have to accept orders that a government seeks to impose unilaterally on another.””

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Bravo, Videgar. The day following, 2-23, had an interesting contretemps, Trump bulldozing and arrogant as ever, if not more so, threatening the military enforcement of mass deportation, Mexico’s leaders bristling with indignation, and Tillerson and Kelly somewhat caught in the middle, trying to calm things down. But the elephant in the room remains Trump; even Kelly, who shouldered the discussion in Mexico, downplayed the military’s role, yet could not give assurances regarding deportation. Trump for working purposes reverses the David-Goliath relation, America the victim, preyed upon by Mexico. Referring to his order “to increase deportations of undocumented immigrants,” he stated (reporters’ summary, here Azam Ahmed, Harris, and Ron Nixon) before invited corporate CEOs that “the days of being treated unfairly by Mexico—on trade, on immigration, on crime—were over.” And in his own words: “You see what’s happening at the border: All of a sudden, for the first time, we’re getting gang members out. And it’s a military operation.””

In the wider context, Kelly’s assurances were not reassuring; he is paraphrased by the reporters that he “was saying the opposite [of Trump], trying to damp down fears of a military operation and to assure the public that American soldiers would not be used to police the border.” Kelly himself: “I repeat: There will be no use of military in this [the “this” being, deportation still stands as directed].” Throughout these differences, which have seldom arisen thus far, Trump has kept a firm hand on the tiller—his “penchant for dropping unwelcome surprises during visits between the United States and Mexico.” The first day of Videgar’s Washington visit last month, Trump “signed an executive order to build a wall between the two countries,” and just this week, timed for Tillerson and Kelly’s arrival, “his administration released policies that vastly expanded the potential for deportation of undocumented immigrants.” A welcoming force in the Family of Nations? With Trump as president it is hard to see that there will ever be peace, in the hemisphere or the world. Ahmed et. al. write that Trump’s “actions and disparaging remarks about Mexico have helped push relations between the two countries to their lowest point in decades.”

This was different from previous visits by American diplomats: “Four officials,” two from each country, “walked into a large ballroom with grim faces and made carefully worded comments without taking any questions.... No one suggested that a breakthrough had been made.” Nor was

there one. Here Tillerson can be relied on to say the vacuous, the meaningless: “Two strong sovereign countries from time to time will have differences.” He offers little else, as Trump, in full operational mode, continues to vilify, to threaten, to act, using the full weight of government—almost as forgetting capitalism for the moment—to mobilize the society tightly fisted to take on all comers, many reluctant to engage, in reaching for world dominance. For it to be Mexico as the pin cushion, rather than, as a product of the Cold War, traditional enemies, is partly to follow the policies and activities of his predecessors (Obama, on a smaller scale, also engaged in deportations), but partly as well to follow his own xenophobic instincts, having little rhyme or reason in a world of orderly capitalist development. The destinations may be similar, but one holds out the prospects of war as an integral historical course.

In summary, the US, Trump in the official lead, ignores the vital role Mexico plays in America’s well-being, from helping to curb drug trafficking, and checking the flow of immigrants from the countries of Central America (and further south), to being the leading purchaser of American agricultural products, the while fully compliant in not seeking to revamp its subordinate status. But with Trump, Mexico is fighting back, doing the work, in the significant area of hegemonic neocolonialism that one would have hoped the American working class, fostering its own anti-imperialist credentials, would have undertaken, yet thus far has not. Sometimes an authentic David, rather than a bloated Goliath, wins out, or in self-protective mode, manages to hold out. America has fewer and fewer allies in the world; at this writing, America needs Mexico more than Mexico needs it, although sheer differences in power disguise this fact. Trump shows us as we really are, or, strictly speaking, as we are presently becoming. Fascism is no longer a word or frame of mind of the past. It is with us today, Mexico only the latest example of how it translates into practice.

MARCH 1, 2017

### **Trump’s Neo-Fascist Discourse: CPAC Revisited**

For an overview of where America stands, let’s begin with Trump’s speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference, 2-24-17, and work outward from there to two interrelated areas to which he refers, attacks on the media and rising militarism, which together provide, more than a glimpse, an actual serving of notice of coming fascistization in America. We have already seen enough of what to expect, the CPAC speech alerting us, beyond Trump’s demagogic style and appeal (an audience of unabashed worshipers at the altar of Reaction, standing and cheering frequently, whenever a particularly rightist point was made, repeated, caressed, on occasion breaking into the chant, “U.S.A.”—a genuinely spontaneous reception of like-minded souls saturated in resentment and venom to match that of the speaker), to his no-holds-barred, non-apologetic statement of antidemocratic themes and key words.

Out of this experience there emerges a frightening characterization of leadership, perhaps like nothing seen before in a president (the line crossed between traditional conservatism in both major parties to a ruthless, cynical expression of plebeian-flavored ideology in service to the very rich) but defining, if the recent election is to be believed, the wave of the future. Curiously, major outlets like The Times did not provide a full transcript of the speech, so what follows is the verbatim transcript, its value lying in the ferocity of response (as seen in the video) almost as much as in Trump’s words. Like an evil conductor, his baton free-swinging, he has the crowd in the palm of his hand.

Trump immediately closes the distance with CPAC: “Great to be back at CPAC. It’s a place I have really—I love this place. I love you people.... And it really is an honor to be here.” This to a body now part of, but previously outside of, the mainstream of American politics. He adds: “I wouldn’t miss a chance to talk to my friends. These are my friends. And we’ll see you again next year and the year after that. And I’ll be doing this with CPAC whenever I can, and I’ll make sure that we’re here a lot.”

Watching this, one feels how hermetically sealed the presidency will be, Trump withdrawing behind ideological walls, then striking out with one negation of democratic practice after another, with no one to answer to—at least that is his hope and the source of his confidence, the confidence a demagogue exhibits when he is convinced that he has taken power into his own hands: here a proto-geese-stepping army of trained seals which bolsters his ego.

Trump plays with the crowd: “sit down, everybody, come on,” as though he learned his politics at Kazan’s “Face in the Crowd,” a folksy fascism to drive home his appeal. Then the attack on the media, fueled by the interrogatory thrust to encourage a unison of thought in the knowing giveback: “You know the dishonest media, they’ll say he didn’t get a standing ovation. You know why? No, you know why? Because everybody stood and nobody sat. So they’ll say he never got a standing ovation, right?” Trump from the start hits his stride, dripping with sarcasm and attaching the key word “dishonest” to “media” to make it stick, before, later, saying it only applies selectively (after it has been drummed home mercilessly).

“They are the worst,” he continues: “So sit down. Donald Trump did not get a standing ovation. They leave out the part they never sat down. They leave that out. So I just want to thank you.” When a speaker refers to himself/herself in the third person, as here, it is time to watch out. (The tone of being under-appreciated defines, here and below, the personal references; more, there is no break or difference—for the speaker, audience, and supporters at the election— between the Leader and the State.)

For what the thanks? Clear demagogic tendencies that only a thickly-suited psychological armor could believe of oneself, for he describes an early sense of being predestined for greatness: “But you know, my first major speech was at CPAC, probably five or six years ago. First major political speech, and you were there. [He seeks legitimacy as he romances the crowd.] And it was—I loved it. I loved the people, I loved the commotion, and then they did these polls where I went through the roof and I wasn’t even running, right? But it gave me an idea. And I got a little bit concerned when I saw what was happening in the country, and I said let’s go for it. So it was very exciting.”

Trump is Immodest, to be sure, but also self-drafted for higher things, together what becomes a messianic complex, he—one step further—the savior of humankind. He is in his element: “I walked the stage on CPAC; I’ll never forget it, really. I had very little notes and even less preparation. So when you have practically no notes and no preparation and then you leave and everybody was thrilled. I said I think I like this business.” Man of destiny (self-proclaimed) or egomaniacal, both apply and one need not choose between them.

Then the springs of fascism open, where he fully aligns himself with CPAC, citing cascading issues (later developed further), and then, amid standing applause, cements his identity with his followers (the fascistic social bond, as in the way he describes it) and segues into a theme of patriotism never far out of sight: “I would have come last year, but I was worried that I’d be at that

time too controversial. We wanted border security, we wanted very, very strong military. We wanted all of the things we're going to get, and people consider that controversial, but you didn't consider it controversial."

Trump has found a home that helps him move the political-ideological spectrum rightward, already present in the configuration of forces to which he appeals, followed by the leap outward, the aforementioned closeness to his constituency. "So," he goes on, "I've been with CPAC for a long time. All of these years we've been together, and now you finally have a president, finally. [thunderous applause] Took you a long time. Took you a long time. And it's patriots like you that made it happen, believe me. You did it because you love your country, because you want a better future for your children, and because you want to make America great again." This is like welcoming a coup—but the long time is over.

Praise of the folk is a sure political formula for success, particularly in scapegoating putative enemies—here more innocuous than his tirades against the media, but sufficient proof of harboring hates and resentments as inseparable both from his personality and his perception of reality. It is innocuous, but nonetheless dangerous: "The media didn't think we would win. The pundits—you're right—they had an idea. The pundits didn't think we'd win. The consultants that suck up all that money—oh, they suck it up—they're so good. They're not good at politics, but they're really good at sucking up people's money. Especially my opponents', because I kept them down to a minimum. [Always the virtuous one] But the consultants didn't think we would win." Trump is instinctively brilliant in setting up the contrast, the nefarious interests and the pristine people, a fascist trick with some pedigree: "But they all underestimated the power of the people, you, and the people proved them totally wrong. This is so true, and this is what's been happening. Never underestimate the people. Never. I don't think it will ever happen again."

Trump is always on the verge of striking out: "And I want you all to know we are fighting the fake news. It's fake. Phony. Fake. A few days ago I called the fake news the enemy of the people, and they are. They are the enemy of the people." With a free press the cornerstone, or prime indicator, of a democratic society, Trump has already declared his lack of sympathy for its value and significance. Cannily, after frequent use of "fake," he draws back, protesting he was not generalizing, even though the repetition and depth of hostility indicate smoldering resentment (a demand for acceptance and even admiration, notwithstanding his disclaimer here): "They're very dishonest people. In fact, in covering my comments, the dishonest media did not explain that I called the fake news the enemy of the people—the fake news. They dropped off the word 'fake'. And all of a sudden the story became the media is the enemy. They take the word 'fake' out. And now I'm saying, oh, no, this is no good. But that is the way they are."

Yet the description is so bitter, the perpetrators of the "fake" so ubiquitous in his view, that his explanation seems unconvincing, not a mea culpa over the need for clearer communication, but a push forward as though his (supposed) intended meaning was always present, and even then a note of anger or sarcasm comes through: "So I'm not against the media, I'm not against the press. I don't mind bad stories if I deserve them, and I tell you, I love good stories, but we won't talk—I don't get too many of them. But I am only against the fake news media or press. Fake. Fake. They have to leave that word."

But does he? “I’m against the people,” he states, “that make up stories and make up sources.” He complains, I think rightly, that sources should be identified (although his group, beginning with Spicer, the press secretary, does not follow the practice). As for criticizing him, “let them say it to my face.” Trump wants admiration and recognition, complimenting Reuters for a “very fair story” about himself, written by “a very honorable” reporter. Again, we see the imposed dichotomy: “There are some great reporters around, they are talented and honest as the day is long; that is great. [Singled out for praise in other statements are Breitbart, the Washington “Times,” etc., and Spicer’s gaggle of newspeople in a closed-door press conference hardly bespeaks respect for a free press, NYT, among others, excluded.] But there are some terrible, dishonest people that do a tremendous disservice to our country, and to our people.”

The attack does not let up, here on the polls during the campaign, presumably stacked against him: “Look at how inaccurate. Look at CBS, look at ABC also. Look at NBC.” His remarks on hated symbols—why he chose and then manipulates them—reveals the selective intolerance of the media among his audience: “Take a look at some of these polls. That were so bad, so inaccurate. And what that does is it creates a whole false narrative. It creates this narrative that it’s just like we’re not going to win.” Here the whining quality becomes unmistakable, if not earlier in the speech: “People say I love Trump but I’m not feeling great today. He can’t win, so I won’t go and vote. It creates a whole false deal, and we have to fight it, folks. We have to fight it. They’re very smart, they’re very cunning, and they’re very dishonest.” And, I would add, they’re essentially centrist, with their own pro-capitalist, pro-defense leanings, and yet to Trump—the personal factor coming into play because of their lack of approval of him, in addition to the obvious, that centrism is for him unacceptable as a menacing Left in disguise—the urge to tear down familiar institutions and structures comes forward.

Relent on this one-sided theme (obsession?), never; for his vindication, as he sees it, lies in his having transcended a political discourse which fails to appreciate his personal qualities, claims to leadership, and policy construct, a well-oiled clock, sealed off from internal opposition and dissent. In that atmosphere Trump can thrive as a Disciple of Truth, one who places patriotism foremost and identifies with flag-worship. A sotto voce tribute to the Second Amendment brings the audience to its feet, but he plays civil libertarian by praising the First: “I love the First Amendment. Nobody loves it better than me. Nobody—who uses it more than I do? But the First Amendment gives all of us ... the right to speak our minds freely. It gives you the right and me the right to criticize fake news and criticize it strongly.”

One would have hoped for a more inclusive usage of the First than attacking the press, but his thinking is warped by, not surprising, conspiracy theory in explaining fake news: “And many of these groups are part of large media corporations, [while favoring wealth, he adopts the Nazi playbook through implying his position of semi-socialism, as in National Socialism, deliberately obfuscating the corporatist foundations of, in Trump’s case, the intended foundations of the polity] that have their own agenda. And it’s not your agenda and it’s not the country’s agenda, it’s their own agenda.” By this point, a free press is even difficult to conceptualize.

Trump here buries it: “... and even now [following the campaign] the fake news doesn’t tell the truth. Doesn’t tell the truth. So just in finishing, I say it doesn’t represent the people, it never will represent the people, and we’re going to do something about it because we have to go out and we



have to speak our minds and we have to be honest.” The veiled threat is now disclosed; government suppression, in context, appears a live option. Yes, “to do something about it.”

He dovetails the thought with a boast about victory in the election—there being little wiggle-room for nonconformity and dissent: “Our victory was a victory and a win for conservative values. And our victory was a win for everyone who believes it’s time to stand up for America, to stand up for the American worker, and to stand up for the American flag. Yeah, there we should stand up. There we should stand up. And, by the way, we love our flag.” In this orgasm of patriotism, one must not overlook the reference to the American worker (increasingly cropping up in Trump’s speeches), part of the theme of class-reconciliation and the diversion of analysis from the monopoly-capitalist foundations of the political economy.

Trump announces (obliquely) the advent of the New World Order, resting on America’s power and virtue: “There is such love in this country for everything we stand for. You saw that on Election Day and you’re going to see it more and more. So we’re all part of this historic movement, a movement the likes of which the world has never seen before. There’s never been anything like this.” The general argument laid down, Trump now rhapsodizes on the new society he seeks to shape—America First, as part of a paradigm of global order masterminded by America: “I’m here to tell you what this means for the future of the Republican Party and the future of America. First, we need to define what this great, great, unprecedented movement is and what it actually represents.”

The fortress-imagery comes immediately to the foreground (yet with an implied active foreign policy), a boastful quality its natural accompaniment: “The core conviction of our movement is that we are a nation that will put its own citizens first. For too long we’ve traded away our jobs to other countries, so terrible. We’ve defended other nations’ borders while leaving ours wide open—anybody can come in. Oh, we’re going to build a wall, don’t worry about it. We’re building the wall. We’re building the wall. In fact, it’s going to start soon. Way ahead of schedule. Way, way, way ahead of schedule.”

What can one make of this? Although party is referenced, Trump thinks in terms of movement, which has the potential, aside from popular mobilization as a step toward regimentation, of bypassing constitutional restraints for a presumed higher order. Too, he seeks to make the wall a certainty, central to withdrawal from normalized international relations, and, beyond nativism, facing the world as though heretofore the victim of horrendous forces—again the immigrant as scapegoat.

We have a borderless America, open to pillage, unprotected, thereby inciting others to take advantage. This calls for internal purgation, cleansing society of those who wish to do America harm, and resulting in a state of new-found innocence and moral purity. (How long, once the process of removal begins, one wonders does it take for the line between immigrant and citizen to be breached, native-born dissidents the symbolical immigrant in our midst.) Thus, Trump observes, of his point man at DHS, “Gen. Kelly, by the way, has done a fantastic job. Fantastic, the job he’s done.” (I’ll return to Kelly outside the confines of the speech, when he justifies full-scale deportation.)

From the reference to Kelly Trump jumps to an angry denunciation of the immigrant, leaving no doubt about the seriousness of his intentions in carrying out mass deportations and the dark waters

he has plumbed: “And remember, we are getting the bad ones out. [This is POTUS speaking, not some rabble-rouser dragged in off the street.] These are bad dudes. We’re getting the bad ones out. Okay? We’re getting the bad—if you watch these people, it’s like oh, gee, that’s so sad. [It’s not clear whether he’s caricaturing his critics, or just being sarcastic.] We were getting bad people out of this country. People who shouldn’t be, whether its drugs or murder. We’re getting bad ones out. They’re the ones who go first. I said it from day one.” Presumably others would follow, charged with lesser crimes, until the reservoir is drained.

Trump’s anger has not (actually it never seems to have) abated. Rebuilding America, beyond a cost-benefit analysis, targets the neglectful within our midst, one more generic scapegoat to deal with: “Basically, all I’ve done is keep my promise [the reference to deportation]. We’ve spent trillions overseas while allowing our own infrastructure to fall into total disrepair and decay. In the Middle East we’ve spent, as of four weeks ago, \$6 trillion. Think of it. And by the way, the Middle East is in what—I mean, it’s not even close—it’s in much worse shape than it was 15 years ago. If our presidents would have gone to the beach for 15 years, we would be in much better shape than we are right now. [This is not FDR advocating for dam construction by PWA, but a snarling chief executive feeling free to belittle his predecessors, not, however, on their record of deregulation, war, and intervention, but simply, malicious neglect, courtesy, as is Trump’s style, thrown out the window.] That I can tell you. Could have been a hell of a lot better. We could have rebuilt our country three times with that money.”

The stage is set for the man-on-horseback theme so beloved in French history: “This is the situation I inherited. I inherited a mess, believe me.” The follow-up is the dismantlement of government, at his initiative, the health-care system a clear priority: “We also inherited a failed health care law that threatens our medical system with absolute and total catastrophe.” That may be so, but for the opposite reason than he intends: not better coverage and squaring off with the medical, health care, and pharmaceutical communities/industries, but, since he has delayed announcing changes, an implied privatization consistent with other proposed changes in federal programs.

Not satisfied, Trump seeks to blame the Democrats, differentiated from the folk, and to view elections as mandates to rollback welfare programs, however sound in constitutional terms: “Obamacare doesn’t work, folks. I could say, I could talk. And now people are starting to develop a little—but the people that you’re watching, they’re not you. They’re largely, many of them are the side that lost. They lost the election. It’s like, how many elections do we have to have? They lost the election.” Stated with finality; one wonders, had he lost and Clinton won, psyched up as he was for leadership, whether he would have become more raucous, possibly even envisioning a coup. No matter, the point is, he won, and is, from his day one (and before), planning the total reconstruction of government and homogenization of domestic society.

On health care, he claims much, without advocating for a public factor informing its workings: “Obamacare covers very few people. And remember, deduct from the number all of the people that had great health care that they loved that was taken away from them. Millions of people were very happy with the health care. They had their doctor, they had their plan. Remember the lie? 28 times. You can keep your doctor. You can keep your plan. Over and over and over again, you heard it. So we’re going to repeal and replace Obamacare.”

Trump is not replacing a single-payer system, nor even provision for a public option; rather, he wants thus far a return to the status quo ante, with little prospect of the elimination of previously-held vested interests. If that were not so, health care would be the lone exception (not including, of course, the vast increase in military spending and execution) in his restructuring of government and bringing the private sector, as before, into the picture.

For one who gives off isolationist signals, Trump is remarkably belligerent, gung ho a useful appellation here. This is to swing into high gear: “We inherited a national debt that has doubled in eight years. Think of it, \$20 trillion. It’s doubled. And we inherited a foreign policy marked by one disaster after another. [His non-stop thinking is not free association so much as it is juxtaposing somewhat disparate topics for the purpose of reinforcing each.] We don’t win anymore. When was the last time we won? Did we win a war? Did we win anything? We’re going to win. We’re going to win big, folks. We’re going to start winning again. Believe me.”

I do, because he seeks to run a war polity, perhaps better, a Warrior State, an interesting mixture in which the polity becomes stripped down, the warrior state combined with a patina of *laissez-faire*. In other words, curb government when regulation is involved, expand it when the military is. He uses the past as sanction (as with the national debt and health care) to project a policy of winning as everything. Trump is on a roll: “But we’re taking a firm, bold, and decisive measure. We have to, to turn things around.” Those familiar with German history will immediately recognize an implied invocation of the stab-in-the-back legend. Trump is again on a Nazi-like wave length: “The era of empty talk is over. It’s over. Now is the time for action. So let me tell you about the actions that we’re taking right now to deliver on our promise to the American people and on my promise to make America great again.”

We are back to square one, the wall and deportation, but by this point in the speech and the revelation of his thinking, this is more than nationalism and isolationism. Like a giant jigsaw puzzle, he fits these and other elements, including vindictiveness, into a workable plan of what I called in previous writing, the pre-fascist configuration containing within itself its actualization. The military component to his vision and planning is never far (as will be seen) from sight.

Hence, he states with accustomed bravado and immodesty: “We’ve taken swift and strong action to secure the southern border of the United States and begin the construction of a great, great border wall. By doing this and with the help of our great border police, with the help of ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement, part of DHS, and Kelly’s bailiwick, now increasingly important to planners], with the help of Gen. Kelly and all of the people that are so passionate about this. Our border patrol, what they do—they came and endorsed me, ICE came and endorsed me—they never endorsed a presidential candidate before. They might not be allowed to, but they were disgusted with what they saw.” (We’ll note shortly that most ICE personnel warmed to their task of deportation and, it turns out, harassment, gladly following Trump’s lead—which speaks to the complicity of government in following the orders of a strong leader.)

This switch in emphasis from the Muslim world to Mexico should not go unnoticed, Mexicans, for Trump, seen as a more immediate and serious threat, as though every Mexican is a drug dealer and potential murderer (the audience at one with him in sentiment): “We’ll stop it, we’ll stop the drugs from pouring into our nation and poisoning our youth. Pouring in. Pouring in. We get the

drugs, they get the money. We get the problems. They get the cash. No good. No good. Going to stop.”

The analysis has a cost-benefit result, immigrants draining America’s resources that might be put to use in rebuilding “struggling American communities, including our inner cities.” Trump does not, however, mention his aversion to the savings in “tax dollars” which are then being applied to public functions—private developers take notice. But the overriding point is less economy in government than the ferreting out of enemies in America’s midst: “As we speak today, immigration officers are finding the gang members, the drug dealers, and the criminal aliens [he lumps them together as one] and throwing them the hell out of our country. And we will not let them back in. They’re not coming back in, folks. They do, they’re going to have bigger problems than they ever dreamed of.” I would add, in relation to Mexican immigrants, stereotyping on Trump’s part, fully evident here, is a well-known trait among authoritarian types.

Much the remainder of the speech deals with a grocery list of demands, the important ones accorded slightly larger discussion. He has “withdrawn America from the Trans-Pacific Partnership so that we can protect our economic freedom,” an example of Trump’s deeply-ingrained unilateralism. He has also disclaimed interest in multilateral trading frameworks, believing as with TPP America would benefit from using its muscle for one-on-one negotiations and agreements: “And we’re going to make trade deals, but we’re going to do one-on-one—one-on-one—and if they misbehave, we terminate the deal, and then they come back and we’ll make a better deal. None of these big quagmire deals that are [a] disaster.” Next he criticizes NAFTA, following from his general view of trade agreements. Then, he relates he authorized the future construction of the Keystone and Dakota pipeline and issued the rule that pipes have to be made of American steel and in this country. (Here Trump is critical of demonstrators of pipeline construction altogether.)

In his review of his policy-making, he makes a point of economic deregulation, as though regulation was anathema to production, employment, and development (thus failing to appreciate its capitalist uses—a sign of Trump’s ultimate lack of sophistication concerning the modern economy, despite his great success as a capitalist): “We’re preparing bold action to lift the restrictions on American energy, including shale oil, natural gas, and beautiful, clean coal, and we’re going to put our miners back to work. Miners are going back to work .... We have begun a historic program to reduce the regulations that are crushing our economy. Crushing.”

And they are “crushing our jobs,” he adds, “because companies can’t hire. We’re going to put the regulation industry out of work and out of business.” Yet with all that he represents and has said before CPAC, Trump’s turnabout on regulation is suspicious, as though living in a parallel universe: “And by the way, I want regulation.” Worse still, he wants comprehensive regulation, except when it hurts business: “I want to protect our environment, I want regulations for safety, I want all of the regulations that we need, and I want them to be so strong and so tough, but we don’t need 75 percent of the repetitive regulations that hurt companies, hurt jobs, make us noncompetitive overseas with other companies from other countries, that we don’t need.”

One senses, after stating that he will put “the regulation industry out of work and out of business,” a mild case of political schizophrenia has set in: “But we’re going to have regulation. It’s going to be really strong and really good, and we’re going to protect our environment and we’re going to protect the safety of our people and our workers, okay.”

There is more, e.g., lowering taxes: “Another major promise is tax reform. We are going to massively lower taxes on the middle class, reduce taxes on American business, and make our tax code more simple and much more fair for everyone [like his use of the worker, Trump cites the middle class when papering over the large gains that would accrue to business], including the people and the business.” In anticipation of “tax reform,” jobs are starting to return to America. Trump will be Trump: “In fact, I think I did more [on this count] than any other president.” He met, as President-elect, with the executives of leading corporations—“I just wanted to save a little time”—which, because of the results of the election, were “making major investments” in the US. In the spirit of unrestrained capitalism (to much applause) he fairly blurted out, “It’s time for all Americans to get off of welfare and get back to work. “You’re going to love it. You are going to love it.”

Finally, in his itemization of changes he wants to bring about, he comes to the military: “We’re also putting in a massive budget request for our beloved military. And we will be substantially upgrading all of our military, all of our military, offensive, defensive, everything.” Nothing could be clearer, with respect to the military, and I would contend, Trump’s proneness to fascism: “Bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and hopefully we’ll never have to use it, but nobody’s going to mess with us, folks. Nobody. It will be one of the greatest military buildups in American history.”

Be it said at this juncture, militarism is not only about engaging in war; it is also about the hierarchical structure of society: the ideological transference from a civil to a military social order inculcating service to the nation, respect for authority, habituation to command, the purging of dissidents, etc. The vast increase in military spending announced (2-28) after CPAC underscores in material-aggressive terms the commitment of the Trump administration’s policy toward war, business growth, a docile labor force—expenditures, incidentally, done specifically at the expense of social welfare measures at home.

To justify this, he sees only present weakness and the hint of betrayal: “No one will dare question, as they have been, because we’re very depleted, very, very depleted sequester. Nobody will question our military might again.” He speaks of “peace through strength,” a seemingly harmless phrase, and probably widely subscribed to in American political and military circles; yet it has an ominous ring, as though given currency by Germany (the analogy of Strength through Joy) in the ‘thirties. “Depletion” has become Trump’s favorite word, in describing what needs to be done—primarily in military terms. Strangelove’s concern about the juices drying up, has met its match. The only thing not to be depleted, for Trump, is the private sector, the public intentionally to be cut to the bone. This politicized quid pro quo, where strengthening the military leads incisively to weakening domestic regulation and (such as it is) reform, characterizes the salience of Trump’s policy framework.

Trump goes from the military to national security, starting by saying that he has “directed the defense community to develop a plan to totally obliterate ISIS,” which leads him back to the topic of the wall: “At the same time, we fully understand that national security begins with border security. Foreign terrorists will not be able to strike America if they cannot get into our country.” He once more returns to an impending Muslim threat, implying an equivalent yet different kind of threat from that posed by Mexico, terrorism versus narcotics and crime. He observes, “Take a look at what’s happening to our world, folks. And we have to be smart. We have to be smart. We can’t

let it happen to us. So let me state this as clearly as I can: We are going to keep radical Islamic terrorists the hell out of our country.” There is considerably less attention in the speech, almost none, devoted to terrorism (the reasons unclear), but the logic of his position, emphasis on a strong military, is that it hovers over his thinking: “We will not be deterred from this course, and in a matter of days we will be taking brand new action to protect our people and keep America safe.” Yes, a touch of braggadocio: “You will see the action. I will never, ever apologize for protecting the safety and security of the American people.”

Nearing the close, Trump delivers (what he believes to be) a knockout punch: “One by one, we’re checking off the promises we made to the people of the United States. One by one. A lot of promises. And we will not stop until the job is done. We will reduce your taxes, we will cut your regulations, we will support our police, we will defend our flag.” In addition, he states, “We will rebuild our military. We will take care of our great, great veterans. We’re taking care of our veterans. We will fix our broken and embarrassing trade deals that are no good. None of them.” In any such list, it is not out of place to find this: “And, by the way, we will protect our Second Amendment.” Nor to give fulsome praise to the National Rifle Association: “And they’re great people. And by the way, they love our country. They love our country. The NRA has been a great supporter. They love our country.”

He has touched base on several foci of Reaction, including CPAC itself, but it is at the close of his speech that Trump reaches the heights of patriotic grandeur. Supposed concern for the American worker provides him some leverage in calling for mass acquiescence in what he is defining as the national purpose—haute capitalism, militarism, societal consensus, and the, perhaps in his mind, interrelated identities between immigrants and terrorists. The cohesion of this vision promises, or so he believes, the stabilization of the political order.

Extolling the political importance of the worker serves as an entering wedge into heightened patriotism and social inclusiveness (albeit on hierarchical lines), much of this buried under the surface of public discourse: “The forgotten men and women of America will be forgotten no longer. That is the heart of this new movement and the future of the Republican party. People came to vote and these people, the media, they said where are they coming from? What’s going on here? These are hard-working, great, great Americans.... The GOP will be from now on the party also of the American worker.” Trump points to the party’s growth, immodestly taking credit: “I won’t say it was because of me, but it was, okay?” Here, near the end, I take my leave from the speech and explore related matters, either previewed (before) or summarized (now), a task made easier because Trump is like a broken record, a person of few and limited ideas—hardly the fertile creativity of FDR and his colleagues.

I am struck by the militarization of consciousness in his speech, but preceding it we already have a clear indication of Trump’s devotion to militarism and his respect/admiration for generals, admirals, and those of military background—provided of course they don’t take issue with him on broad policy goals. But unlike flag-worship, or in addition to it, he seeks to make an analytical case for militarism, predicated on sheer power, geopolitical ambition, and, at home, the high defense requirements (or so he imagines) of Fortress America. Defense is never for its own sake, but the reverse side of, and indistinguishable from, offense.

I have in mind, beyond budgets and boasting, the high number of military personnel occupying major positions in the administration. This takes on the appearance of a *fait accompli*, so early does it occur in, and places its stamp on, the administration. Nothing quite like it before. The signs are all around us. Take for example Peter Baker and Eric Schmitt's New York Times article, "3 Generals Bound by Iraq Will Guide Trump on Security" (2-21). Briefly, the reporters write that Trump's "appointment of H.R. McMaster, an Army lieutenant general, as his new national security adviser creates a powerful troika of senior officers who served in Iraq, teaming him up with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and John F. Kelly, the secretary of homeland security, both retired four-star Marine generals." Significantly Baker and Schmitt note: "This administration is the first to have all three security jobs filled by senior military veterans at the same time." The best case for the generals, that they bucked the military hierarchy, may or not stand up when one considers—supposed independence notwithstanding—how far they have come in and then beyond that hierarchy. Moreover, that Steve Bannon sits on the national security principals committee only adds to the closed nature of military and strategic thinking.

The New York Times editorial, "Mr. Trump's 'Deportation Force' Prepares an Assault on American Values," (2-22), as the name implies, sweeps away any notion of Kelly's alleged moderation. His memos just released are the "battle plan" for this deportation force Trump promised in the campaign: "They are remarkable for how completely they turn sensible immigration policies [what would make them sensible, except presumably in accord with Obama's strictures?] upside down and backward. For how they seek to make the deportation machinery more extreme and frightening (and expensive), to the detriment of deeply held American values." With Obama, deportation was reserved for "dangerous criminals, national-security threats and recent border crossers."

By contrast, Kelly "has swept away those notions. He makes practically every deportable person a deportation priority. He wants everybody, starting with those who have been convicted of any crime, no matter how petty or old." Proportionality is out the window. This is emerging as the fascist state in microcosm, from contempt for the rule of law to an avowed militaristic mind-set in the conduct of policy itself (mine). The editorial—to NYT's credit—continues: "The targets now don't even have to be criminals. They could simply have been accused of a crime (that is, still presumed "innocent") or have done something that makes an immigration agent believe that they might possibly face charges." In sum, Kelly is "keeping his options open about whether to short-circuit due process [currently, those caught within two miles of the border for swift deportation without a hearing] with a coast-to-coast show-me-your-papers policy." This becomes a police state, particularly with the enlargement of ICE officers and Border Patrol guards, along with the transmission downward to local and state officials to conduct similar operations. The Times again: "He [Kelly] wants to ramp up programs deputizing state and local law enforcement officers as immigration enforcers. He calls them 'a highly successful force multiplier,' which is true if you want a dragnet."

We have here the intersection of military spending, deportation, and the wall, the latter perhaps less possible to spot, but in Trump's thinking and planning, not only adding to the political claims for the necessity of a strong military, but to ensure, beyond the undocumented immigration people, that the citizenry live partly in fear (evident today) and accommodative to the combined political-military establishment under Trump. Kelly is instrumental in molding an uncritical base for

sanctioning the weakening of meaningful civil liberties for American society, his remark on “force multiplier” showing how deeply military lingo infuses the administration.

Here Trump’s attack on the media joins the wall as feeding into the general militaristic posture of how he is transforming America into a land of fear and suspicion, a Hobbesian world of international struggle whose counterpart at home is class-jealousy, such as remains, of class-differences, and a soft population weakening the nation with its claims for social justice. Can America outlive the Trump Phenomenon, and if so, is there still something worse coming down the pike? Continuity, as opposed to revolutionary change, best describes the structural-historical process. America elected Trump as testimony to the century-old accommodation to its experience of increasing consolidation and military engagement and preparedness in defining its pattern of capitalist development.

MARCH 6, 2017

### **Descent into Fascism: Corporate-Militarist Paradigm**

Trump’s speech to a joint-session of Congress, 2-28, is a milestone in political-ideological deception. Joseph Goebbels could not have said it better, the “it” being the inversion of American reality as the nation seeks a further leg up on global hegemony and at the same time cheapens if not degrades its labor force. Liberals feel a sense of outrage, focusing their criticism on much benighted Jeff Sessions, rather than on the emasculation of government, near-destruction of the social welfare sector, a monstrous arms build-up, absolute spoliation of water and other resources, and defying other environmental needs and safeguards, not least the effect of fracking and coal mining on climate change.

Liberals, i.e., Democrats, are either unable and unwilling to protest on the systemic level (whatever the issue) or have already become, as complicit partners, a hazily leftwing extension of the Trumpian weltanschauung or consensus forming in the United States. From a Left standpoint, they are a disgrace to human identity and humanitarian ideals, like the Republicans corporatist in assumptions (here a modified hierarchical social order) and militaristic in every fiber of their being, a heritage of anticommunism still subscribed to and intended by their patriotism to remove all stigma to disloyalty. The pusillanimous fight they are putting up against Trump tends to confirm the preceding characterization.

By descent I don’t mean final destination arrived at, merely, up until now the circumnavigation of fascism (in its early, more corporatist form, as in the activities and approval of the National Association of Manufacturers, rather than—isolationism quite pronounced—militarism in overt form) beginning in the 1920s. In Europe and Japan there are of course stirrings of fascism in that decade, with Italy actualizing the form, and in the 1930s Germany and Japan truly come into their own in that respect. The source for this development is capitalism, with specific ideologies, now incorporating avowed militarism, becoming rationales for both intra-capitalist rivalries and blunt anti-socialism.

With and following World War II, militaristic underpinnings have become a necessitous element in the definition of capitalism, nowhere more clearly seen than in the US. Now, with Trump, circumnavigation around, is turning directly into the penetration of the genuine article. We move,



under Trump, as in his address to Congress, from “exploitative capitalism,” the traditional form, to “liar capitalism,” which subsumes into itself the former, yet adds a dimension of ulterior disguise and motive that makes one alert to the prospect of permanent change.

Fascism can be many-layered, and, as in Nazi Germany, seemingly less bottomless in depravity, but as I’ve noted elsewhere, it doesn’t require the concentration camp or gas chamber, and primarily, in historical form, it is based ultimately on the close alignment (co-partnership) of capitalism and the state, or more concretely, business and government. In that structural context, the impetus of the first to the second (although a reverse influence is also manifest) is the creation and reinforcement of hierarchy as the organizing principle of the social order. The capitalist class system, already in place, is then superimposed on what becomes a class-state, to defend and replenish of which the military factor springs forth as though by necessity.

For fascism to operate, the parallel structures require the degree of integration which renders each of them more internally advanced, the better to complement and reinforce the potential war-provoking tendencies of both. And more, social regimentation as well is a long-term product of class and war (or its constant threat as presented by its leaders). Even without their closeness in a formal sense, we see that each, especially starting with the twentieth century, contains, as a separable factor, the same quest for hegemony and self-aggrandizement having the effect of creating a common, synthesized ruling group.

Trump, in all his arrogant innocence—innocence in the sense of ignorance of how devastating his role is, for the destruction of a society that still claims to be a democratic polity—is fairly transparent in the deceptions practiced, measured by the policies already charted or enacted compared with statements he is making (the speech to Congress) or has already made. He is adept at locating the discussion of military strengthening, tax favoritism to giant corporations, the near-destruction of public-school education (only one of several options, with no special tax benefits), and the generalized dismantlement of government, in a context with platitudes about citizenship, patriotism, American greatness, in sum, a demagogic mishmash whose function is, beyond promoting concentrated wealth, deregulation, and national power, the obfuscation pure and simple of all policy making because detrimental to societal democratization and the heading off of the threat of fascism (itself subject to all manner of euphemistic expressions).

Let’s turn, then, to the speech. (I am drawing on the prepared text, and may have missed slight alterations or verbal asides—as well as his use of repetition.) Trump begins with a celebration of “our Nation’s path toward civil rights and the work that still remains,” and a philo-Semitism addressing the threat to Jewish community centers and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries. High-minded and certainly unobjectionable, save that his framework and appointments—a genuinely white man’s party—and his remarks in defense of Judaism which come down to the ironclad support for Israel, purposely lack a (small-“d”) democratic thrust in relating to each. He follows the tribute with, typical throughout the speech, a splurge of sentiment in which his speechwriters (Bannon? etc.) must have taken delight in their craftsmanship: “Each American generation passes the torch of truth, liberty and justice—in an unbroken chain all the way down to the present. This torch is now in our hands. And we will use it to light up the world. I am here tonight to deliver a message of unity and strength, and it is a message deeply delivered from my heart.”

The American future converges on Trump, a frightening thought when one considers how he is reaching already to become the Leader, his melding with his followers (it is presumed he speaks for the Nation), the toleration hardly expected to be coming applied to dissident views or, in steamroller mode on his part, resistance and opposition. Thus, he states: “A new chapter of American Greatness is now beginning. A new national pride is sweeping across our Nation. And a new surge of optimism is placing impossible dreams firmly within our grasp.” After more of the same, this wondrous state of mind is joined by hints at military superiority and greatness: “Our allies will find that America is once again ready to lead. All the nations of the world—friend or foe—will find that America is strong, America is proud, and America is free.”

In his contemplation of the future (America soon will celebrate its 250th year), he then begins to pull out the stops on his fervent nationalism, his ridicule of past presidents, his claims of generosity in foreign policy: “I will not allow the mistakes of recent decades past to define the course of our future. For too long, we’ve watched our middle class shrink as we’ve exported our jobs and wealth to foreign countries [outsourcing on the part of the very corporations he praises in the speech and as a constant theme]. We’ve financed and built one global project after another [not to say, his own activities in creating international projects], but ignored the fates of our children in the inner cities of Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit—and so many other places throughout our land.”

Concern for the poor is touching, but it seems contrary to his Billionaire Cabinet, plans for military expansion which directly affect the fate of ameliorating conditions in the inner cities, and his active promotion, the whole weight of his administration, on furthering the inequitable distribution of wealth. And the recriminatory spirit continues, this despite his previous disregard for borders where investment is concerned: “We’ve defended the borders of other nations, while leaving our own borders wide open, for anyone to cross [open sesame for anti-immigrant policy and feeling]—and for drugs to pour in at a now unprecedented rate. And we’ve spent trillions of dollars overseas, while our infrastructure at home has so badly crumbled.” That infrastructure, frequently mentioned in the speech, is the province of privatization, not, like the New Deal, testimony to the will of government to stand on behalf of the public function.

Here Trump the megalomaniac speaks up, the undisputed leader of a mass movement bursting the seams of government itself, so vast the groundswell for change as he directs it: “Then, in 2016, the earth shifted beneath our feet. The rebellion started as a quiet protest [from the Nazi playbook, making “rebellion” the basis for a popular movement of the dispossessed, and not the rich industrialist or banker], spoken by families of all colors and creeds—families who just wanted a fair shot for their children, and a fair hearing for their concerns.” It grew, plain folk angry and on the march: “But then the quiet voices became a loud chorus—as thousands of citizens now spoke out together, from cities small and large, all across our country.” (In all fairness to Trump, this was a somewhat accurate description of the 2016 election, in which the fascistic proclivities of a wide swath of the citizenry came out of the woodwork to give him the nomination and election, provided of course it is also recognized that electorate and candidate each reinforced these proclivities of the other.)

He completes the description of political inundation, a tidal wave of Reaction: “Finally, the chorus became an earthquake—and the people turned out by the tens of millions, and they were all united by one very simple, but crucial demand, that America must put its own citizens first—because only then, can we truly MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN [the form in the transcript]. If

this is not a good introduction to incipient fascism, I don't know what is, as if, to go back, Hitler told the workers (another euphemism, "soldiers in industry") you are first and foremost a German, divorced from class roots or alternative identities.

From there to the aforementioned mishmash, militarism and monopoly capital get somehow lost in the deeds putatively to be accomplished. Thus, "Dying industries will come roaring back to life. Heroic veterans will get the care they so desperately need. Our military will be given the resources its brave warriors so richly deserve. Crumbling infrastructure will be replaced with new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and railways gleaming across our beautiful land.... Above all else, we will keep our promises to the American people." Here Trump wants "to update the Nation on the progress I've made in keeping those promises."

The honor roll of corporate wealth is presented as exemplification of America First, yet in several cases known previously for their overseas investments: "Since my election, Ford, Fiat-Chrysler, General Motors, Sprint, Softbank, Lockheed, Intel, Walmart, and many others, have announced that they will invest billions of dollars in the United States [that may be true, to be on the good side of Trump] and will create tens of thousands of new American jobs." But none with a practical presence in international economic affairs is going to divest and return home, nor attempt to alter the structure of world capitalism (except as it continues to further US prominence and predominance globally), which is already in America's favor.

In Trump's bag of rhetorical tricks, we see the inveterate boastfulness, he, the near messiah, flattered by the loyalty of a large public in the maw of false consciousness, take credit for the rise of the market simultaneous with, not coincidentally, drastic cutting of the welfare sector, his supporters cheering "U.S.A." along the way. Only the military benefits from his priorities and framework of government: "The stock market gained almost three trillion dollars in value since the election on November 8th, a record. [I think here of Huey Long's "Every man a king," except that Trump operates on a gigantic scale—and Long possibly had some redeeming features, such as eschewing race-baiting in the deep South.] We've saved taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars by bringing down the price of the fantastic new F-35 jet fighter [debatable savings given the record thus far, and, when Trump uses "fantastic," unlikely to upset the apple cart given his admiration of weapons systems], and will be saving billions more dollars on contracts all across our Government. We have placed a hiring freeze on non-military and non-essential Federal workers."

Behind the theme of budget savings, however, lies the cardinal demand for deregulation, which opens the way for an attack on the environment: "We have undertaken a historic effort to massively reduce job-crushing regulations [the use of working people to camouflage staking out a claim for corporate capitalism], creating a deregulation task force inside of every Government agency: imposing a new rule which mandates that for every 1 new regulation, 2 old regulations must be eliminated; and stopping a regulation that threatens the future and livelihoods of our great coal miners." The 1 for 2 ruling is, in conception, a veiled effort to destroy, given its arbitrary nature, the regulatory effectiveness of the process—cynicism nonpareil. As for the environment, on pending measures, he says: "We have cleared the way for the construction of the Keystone and Dakota Access Pipelines—thereby creating tens of thousands of jobs—and I've issued a new directive that new American pipelines be made with American steel."

Quite a first five weeks of activity, this reminds me of a dystopian vision of FDR's Hundred Days in microcosm, a vicious approach to what should have been a rebuilding effort of renaissance proportions. Stopping the supply of drugs from entering America becomes the whipping boy for unrelated, or seemingly related, aspects of Trump's program: obviously, the construction of the wall, but also the purification of domestic America, immigration-controls in general, and job creation. Trump's get-tough policies represent a top-down framing of injecting totalitarian controls on society, using crime as a catch-all for pretext of embellishing the theme of Fortress America, which implicitly suffuses the speech.

He states: "We will stop the drugs from pouring into our country and poisoning our youth—and we will expand treatment for those who have become so badly addicted." Then the direct jump: "At the same time, my Administration has answered the pleas of the American people for immigration enforcement and border security. By finally enforcing our immigration laws, we will raise wages, help the unemployed, save billions of dollars, and make our communities safer for everyone." Hard to know if he here fuses Mexicans and Muslims from the seven proscribed countries as a unified threat, but the speech constantly invokes a genocidal vision of so-called deplorables or undesirables: "We want all Americans to succeed—but that can't happen in an environment of lawless chaos. We must restore integrity and the rule of law to our borders."

Rule of law is problematic, with the much-feared round-up already in progress. Restoring integrity means, "we will soon begin the construction of a great wall [now Trump, Chinese Emperor] along our southern border. It will be started ahead of schedule and, when finished, it will be a very effective weapon against drugs and crime. As we speak, we are removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals that threaten our communities and prey on our citizens. Bad ones are going out as I speak tonight and as I have promised."

Trump has not forgotten the presumed Muslim threat: "Our obligation is to serve, protect, and defend the citizens of the United States. We are also taking strong measures to protect our Nation from Radical Islamic Terrorism." In fact, he sees that practically lurking under every bed: "According to data provided by the Department of Justice, the vast majority of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offenses since 9/11 came here from outside of our country," and then there are attacks "in France, in Belgium, in Germany and all over the world." And so, "[i]t is not compassionate, but reckless, to allow uncontrolled entry from places where proper vetting cannot occur. Those given the high honor of admission to the United States should support this country and love its people and its values."

Spoken like a true patriot. Trump is on the job, having issued orders for the "Department of Defense to develop a plan to demolish and destroy ISIS," impose "new sanctions on entities and individuals who support Iran's ballistic missile program," and reaffirm "our unbreakable alliance with the State of Israel," all of this immediately followed by a tribute to the late Antonin Scalia, whose wife sat in the gallery. As he approaches the closing, his speech takes on a current of hyper-nationalism, achieved through criticism of previous, especially Obama's, administrations.

The gloves are off: "Tonight, as I outline the next steps we must take as a country, we must honestly acknowledge the circumstances we inherited." Perversely, these are the very facts which give a lie to what he hopes to accomplish, given his failure to consider any but rightist proposals for societal improvement: "Ninety-four million Americans are out of the labor force. Over 43 million

people are now living in poverty, and over 43 million Americans are on food stamps. More than 1 in 5 people in their prime working years are not working. We have the worst financial recovery in 65 years. In the last 8 years, the past Administration has put on more new debt than nearly all other Presidents combined.” To boot, “we have inherited a series of tragic foreign policy disasters.”

Much of which Trump criticizes could be said by a radical, on unemployment and a consequent maldistribution of wealth, except that his premise for constructing and justifying the criticism is the near-irrefragable principle (to him) of privatization, the self-evident goal in displacing the welfare and/or regulatory functions of government. We have no assurance that each problem he cites would not fare still worse under his aegis. He even calls at this point for bipartisan cooperation in advancing his agenda: solving the foregoing, “and so many other pressing problems, will require us to work past the differences of party. It will require us to tap into the American spirit that has overcome every challenge throughout our long and storied history.”

With that flourish, we now, but briefly, find the emphasis on antigovernment privatization: “But to accomplish our goals at home and abroad, we must restart the engine of the American economy [as though it was in the hands until now of nefarious socialists]—making it easier for companies to do business in the United States, and much harder for companies to leave.” To sugar the pot, Trump adds: “Right now, American companies are taxed at one of the highest rates anywhere in the world [a dubious assertion]. My economic team is developing historic tax reform that will reduce the tax rate on our companies so that they can compete and thrive anywhere and with anyone. [Fortress America is not the abandonment of foreign markets. Autarky here has an expansive dimension of growth.] At the same time, we will provide massive tax relief for the middle class. We must create a level playing field for American companies and workers.” Both workers and the middle class provide buffers against the government’s getting too close in the regulation of these companies.

Complaining about high tariffs placed on American goods, yet “when foreign companies ship their products into America, we charge them almost nothing,” Trump, using Harley Davison (“they proudly displayed five of their magnificent motorcycles, made in the USA, on the front lawn of the White House”) for illustration, he lambastes other countries for their protective tariff, proclaiming: “I believe strongly in free trade but it also has to be FAIR TRADE [caps in the original transcript].” By now his message is clear: the wall to protect against immigrants is analogous to the wall sealing America from global restrictions by its aggressive business and military leaders, this through leaping over economic battlements without fear of retaliation.

He wants the adoption of a merit-based system of immigration, infrastructural improvement, citing Eisenhower’s record on the interstate highway system, and, on rebuilding, the observance of two principles: Buy American, and Hire American. This he attaches to what is quite different: “Tonight, I am calling on this Congress to repeal and replace Obamacare with reforms that expand choice [privatization], increase access, lower costs, and at the same time, provide better Healthcare. None of these is, or will be, shown for likely adoption. Of course, instead, again privatization: “Mandating every American to buy government-approved health insurance was never the right solution for America. [That compulsory in practice?] The way to make health insurance available to everyone is to lower the cost of health insurance, and that is what we will do.... One third of counties have only one insurer on the exchanges—leaving America with no choice at all. Remember when you were told that you could keep your doctor, and keep your plan? We now know that all of those promises have been broken.” Not a word on the public option or single-payer

system, which would go a long way to correcting the present high costs and his other complaints, freedom of choice, another barrier, ideological in nature, to prevent direct government involvement.

Trump is impatient. On health care, he says: “Obamacare is collapsing—and we must act decisively to protect all Americans. Action is not a choice—it is a necessity.” He presents a five-part plan, in scrapping the existing system never mentioning the privatization route by name, and he does this with a plea for bipartisan cooperation, which, for Democrats, surrenders what little there is worth retaining. Hence, he says: “I am calling on all Democrats and Republicans in the Congress to work with us to save Americans from this imploding Obamacare disaster.” A private system is the watchword, so that, on point one, the movement to that status is clear from his demand that Americans with pre-existing conditions have access to coverage [implying a transfer of coverage], and that we have a stable transition [again implying a transfer from public to private] for Americans currently enrolled in the healthcare exchanges.” Second, more specific, “we should help Americans purchase their own coverage, through the use of tax credits and expanded Health Savings Accounts—but it must be the plan they want, not the plan forced on them by the Government.” (One might see Trump’s thinking revolving around the fetishism of choice, except that “choice” is coded to indicate the correct direction.) Third, “we should give our great State Governors the resources and flexibility they need with Medicaid to make sure no one is left out.” That is, sacrifice Medicaid to the states entirely, the likelihood of adequate coverage for all problematic. Fourth, afford the medical profession absolute protection against malpractice and other suits—patients, like workers and the middle class, a barrier to taking effective action, and fifth, provide direct assistance to the health insurance industry, allowing companies to cross state lines—“creating a truly competitive national marketplace [once more sanctioning the private] that will bring cost way down and provide far better care.”

Introducing from the gallery another guest, a young woman who at 15 months had contracted “a rare and serious illness,” whose father “founded a company to look for a cure, and helped develop the drug that saved Megan’s life.” She is now 20. What is interesting is the use made of a purely human interest story—a criticism of the Food and Drug Administration for not hastening the review process in evaluating the safety of drugs: “If we slash the restraints, not just at the FDA but across our Government, then we will be blessed with far more miracles like Megan.” This of course applies to regulation in general, a persnickety federal government gumming up the works, inconsistent with—as in coal—the dismantling of government by the new forces in Washington.

And in a neat quarter turn to a pressing subject on the regulatory front—the survival of public education—Trump, as in his selection of DeVos as education secretary, throws himself four-square on several alternative possibilities all on the private side of the ledger. On the offering of choice, and using blacks and Latinos as enticement for his plan, he states: “I am calling upon Members of both parties to pass an education bill that funds school choice for disadvantaged youth, including millions of African-American and Latino children. These families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school that is right for them.” In politicizing school education—quite a menu of choices—Trump has thechutzpah of wrapping schools in a context of civil rights, perhaps calculated to resonate among liberals (to the sacrifice of public education), for as he says preceding the list: “Education is the civil rights issue of our time.”

More guests are recognized, each supporting one of Trump’s talking points. One, Denisha, “failed third grade twice.... [b]ut then she was able to enroll in a private center for learning, with

the help of a tax credit and scholarship program.” Then came remarks on violence, the murder rate in Chicago, and the need for cooperation with and respect for the police: “We must build bridges of cooperation and trust—not drive the wedge of disunity and division.” This is well put, although he sentimentalizes the topic bringing it into line with the tenor of his law-and-order self-created mandate: “We must support the incredible men and women of law enforcement.” And to drive home the dangers out there (immigrant scare?) he states, “I have ordered the Department of Homeland Security to create an office to serve American Victims. The office is called VOICE—Victims of Immigrant Crime Engagement,” a prejudgment further enflaming the populace when it comes on board. Then, not through, he introduces four more guests from the gallery, victims, themselves or a loved one, of crime. The emphasis on crime and violence suddenly introduces him, as though related, to the virtues of a strong military.

Brief and to the point: “Finally, to keep America Safe we must provide the men and women of the United States military with the tools they need to prevent war and—if they must—to fight and win. I am sending the Congress a budget that rebuilds the military, eliminates the Defense sequester [that which sets it apart], and calls for one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history.” There is to be more for veterans in the package: “Our veterans have delivered for this Nation—and now we must deliver for them. The challenges we face as a Nation are great. But our people are even greater. And none are greater or braver than those who fight for America in uniform.”

He then uses the death of Navy SEAL Ryan Owen, his “legacy etched into history,” although there remains doubt about the efficacy of the raid, to assert: “To those allies who wonder what kind of friend America will be, look no further than the heroes who wear our uniform.” Coming from on high, already to dissuade critics of policy, here foreign policy, Trump softens—for home political consumption—his Fortress America idea, first conceding little, “Our foreign policy calls for a direct, robust and meaningful engagement with the world. It is American leadership based on vital security issues that we share with our allies across the globe.” Next, he gives, contrary to his recent record, qualified support to NATO: “We strongly support NATO.... But our partners must meet their financial obligations. And now, based on our very strong and frank discussions, they are beginning to do just that.”

Acknowledging his nationalist (from what just preceded, nationalism itself is code for the corporate-militarist paradigm) deeply-embedded viewpoint, Trump announces: “We will respect historic institutions, but we will also respect the sovereign rights of nations.... My job is not to represent the world. My job is to represent the United States of America. But we know that America is better off, when there is less conflict—not more.” Let’s leave matters at that; he does not let go of dramatizing the high ground: “Think of the marvels we can achieve if we simply set free the dreams of our people.” Setting free, liberating, follow from reducing the intervention of government in the people’s lives. Why not proclaim victory, given the moral virtue of America? He outlines the factors in part composing America’s greatness: “This is our vision. This is our mission. But we can only get there together. We are one people, with one destiny. We all bleed the same blood. We all salute the same flag. And we are all made by the same God.’

Trump wants Americans to Think Big, capitalist in inspiration, a vital private sector buttressed by taking regulation off the table, venerating and appreciating the contribution being made for all of us by successful men of business, and possessing armed might second to none. I see fascism in the

spirit and substance of the harmonious relations between capitalism and the state, found in earlier administrations going back, but now reaching a tipping point to seemingly irreversible structural-ideological trends under Trump. Without wishing to sound cryptic, I believe being is becoming, that is, the present context of power is rapidly progressing into a new political reality, a state having the makings of authoritarianism, which foretells the future—its petrification—of democracy. The military neatly tucked into more pacific concerns, I have sought to point out some of the contradictions in Trump's speech.

MARCH 8, 2017

### **Evisceration of Freedom: Surgical Authoritarianism**

America in self-flagellation, though seemingly at the apex of power and virtue in the world, supinely bows to the Maximum Leader, less out of guilt, than out of the need for authoritarian submission, a desire for oneness with, here, Trump to conquer fears about the future, and in need of protection. The attachment is unhealthy; democratic governance inevitably suffers. America is facing a crisis, watching, even participating in, the postponement, weakening, or elimination of regulations affecting health standards, safety, environmental quality, social programs benefiting the poor and disadvantaged, in sum, the dismantlement of the structure and practice of societal welfare in its positive dimensions of public service. The basest instincts of humankind have come to the surface. Self-flagellation is merely a nervous twitch, knowing, if not fully consciously, the wrongs being committed on practically an hourly basis to oneself and one's fellow citizens, nevertheless refusing to change the direction of the polity—a direction on track for the realization of fascism.

There must be comfort in certainty of rectitude, of tapping into the power of those, beginning with Trump, whose prepotency in the social structure invites—draws in—the alienated who want desperately to belong, but also the opportunist seeking a step up the ladder of success. Trump did not single-handedly win a presidential election, and then, in six weeks thus far as president, compile a record of guerrilla warfare against government, all the more striking in that the military-factor had become greatly magnified. This leaves a militaristic spirit drawing sustenance from resentments—to be covered over—because structure and equality had long parted company, and a complementary spirit of nihilism, which translates into the propensity for war, the expectation of international tension, and un-sublimated dreams of hegemony.

But if not single-handed in accounting for his electoral triumph, we must face the reality of the society that elected him, and that to this moment does not, Democratic and even progressive organized party and groups, question an ascending neo-fascist (moving toward consummation) political movement legitimated through office establishing itself in power. The strategy at this still early stage I would call, for now, pointillistic fascism, not as in abstract art, but rather as the concrete placement of, already, hundreds of efforts, points of contact, to hold back or rescind the regulatory function per se of government.

The formula is, strike a thousand blows on the microcosmic level against government intervention (again, absent the military) wherever it can be found, like California's regulation of tailpipe emissions of carbon dioxide, then creating a cumulative build-up to foster a regulation-free environment resulting in a qualitative change better conducive to business consolidation, profit-taking, immunity from prosecution for antisocial deeds and their consequences, and, perhaps



indirectly (though not for Trump and the coterie surrounding him), strong encouragement of the military.

It is the seemingly minor violations of human freedom that fail to grab our attention, on which Trump is banking to start the fuller dismantlement of government, but the sheer volume of activity on the lines of non-enforcement, delay, abrogation—using Executive power, instead of turning to Congress—of specific regulation in a myriad of fields that explains what I mean by descriptive characterization of surgical: incisive cutting away or neutralizing of regulation, point-by-point, a pock-marked political-economic landscape, where once guardianship by government was thought a moral obligation fulfilling its purpose. Now, regulation is a hated word in ever-widening circles, whether a propagandistic assault on the senses or the long-term historical cultivation of false consciousness predicated on variations of what was once termed (late 19th century) the Gospel of Wealth.

The anticipated result of Trump's early strategy is movement from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic, beyond a regulation-free social order that, contrary to his pronouncements, objectively leads to social differentiation in terms of wealth, class, and power. Only when the macrocosmic or systemic level is reached, can Reaction be assumed and militarism, amply funded and with ineffectual domestic resistance, be taken for granted as the desirable state of existence.

My point, however, on seemingly minor violations of human freedom requires brief elaboration. They, as in a pointillistic spreadsheet, even when violations are still inchoate, decisively count for the future of a society and coalesce with others. Minor ultimately become major instances of totalitarian abuse, yet at first barely discernible in the larger schema, then, like a spreading cancer, are integrated with the social system as a whole. These violations (we'll see examples below, e.g., the deregulated tailpipe emissions) contribute to a wider context of authoritarianism.

Trump in this respect can be seen to be running wild, firing off executive orders the moment an opportunity for rescindment or the like arises. His lack of restraint (already the rollback of regulations approaches one hundred) appears like a willy-nilly exercise of power when in reality the first six weeks in power have resulted in a concerted, premeditated harm and malevolence greater than at the beginning of any previous presidency.

He is methodical; his actions are well planned, calculated to come together in a unified framework. Ideas, including those generated by Bannon and a small group of advisers, and subjoined to the exercise of power, enable Trump to realize his own long-term antiradicalism and contempt for the truth and restraint of any kind on his dystopian vision of class relations and capital accumulation. The result to date: America, this early in his administration (when precedents are created), can be found on the doorstep of fascism.

Testimony to Trump's neo-fascistic outlook, and that of his close advisers and Cabinet appointments, need not dwell on the obvious, the addition to an already humongous military budget and the round-up of undocumented immigrants for deportation, for I believe it is the multiplicity of small points on the authoritarian compass that better reveals the potentiality of what is transpiring for long-term totalitarianism now emerging. Examples abound in Eric Lipton and Benjamin Applebaum's New York Times article, "Leashes Come Off Wall Street, Gun Sellers, Miners and More." 3-5-17. (The article also appeared under various titles, depending on its location in the paper.) Immediately we see a photograph of the National Rifle Association convention this past

May in Louisville. The caption reads: “The gun-rights group lobbied [successfully it turns out] against a rule that would have effectively prevented most people with disabling mental illnesses from purchasing firearms.” The foot in the door, other measures such as affecting lead-based bullets (no longer banned) came under review, a similar narrative for breaking open the regulatory framework the length and breadth of society.

As for example, that of the carbon-dioxide emitting tailpipes, we see no end to the process of deregulation. Government is being brought to a standstill. Coral Davenport, writing in *The Times*, “Trump to Undo Vehicle Rules That Curb Global Warming,” 3-3, (roll-back our operative term), states: “The Trump administration is expected to begin rolling back stringent federal regulations on vehicle pollution that contributes to global warming.... [A joint announcement is expected from EPA administrator Scott Pruitt and transportation secretary Elaine Chao this week.] The regulatory rollback on vehicle pollution will relax restrictions on tailpipe emissions of carbon dioxide and [significantly] will not require action by Congress.”

Davenport adds, “The E.P.A. will also begin legal proceedings to revoke a waiver for California that was allowing the state to enforce the tougher tailpipe standards for its citizens.” What’s wrong with America? Has the country gone berserk in eliminating more stringent protective standards for its people? Capitalism has thrown America to the wolves. The tail (automakers) wags the dog (the nation), the former complaining that producing a greater proportion of electric and hybrid models, and reaching higher fuel-efficiency standards, constitutes, particularly for the larger automakers, “technical requirements too burdensome.”

The examples of regulatory dismantlement pile one on top of another in never ceasing flow. Hence, “Verizon and AT&T will not,” Lipton and Applebaum write, “have to take ‘reasonable measures’ to ensure that their customers’ Social Security numbers, web browsing history and other personal information are not stolen or accidentally released.” So much for privacy. Nor another case in point, “Wall Street banks like Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase will not be punished, at least for now, for not collecting extra money from customers to cover potential losses from certain kinds of high-risk trades that helped unleash the 2008 financial crisis.” It all gets perhaps worse and certainly more voluminous: “more than 90 regulations that federal agencies and the Republican-controlled Congress have delayed, suspended or reversed,” tallied by *The Times*, in this short time, echoing Bannon’s much-quoted boast of “the deconstruction of the administrative state,” an epithet of course in these circles.

The writers note, without exaggeration: “The emerging effort—dozens of additional rules could be eliminated in the coming weeks—represents one of the most significant shifts in regulatory policy in recent decades.” My take: Government by stealth. Although Trump, Bannon, and company are hardly innocent bystanders to these developments, one must not overlook the (agreeable) role of outside—truly inside—pressure: “In many cases, records show that the changes came after appeals by corporate lobbyists and trade association executives, who see a potentially historic opportunity to lower compliance costs and drive up profits. [Not all is abstract ideology] Slashing regulations, they argue, will unleash economic growth.”

This is the hidden history of American capitalist development brought now up to date and perhaps extended: “On a near daily basis, regulated industries are now sending in specific requests to the Trump administration for more rollbacks, including recent appeals from 17 automakers to

rescind an agreement to increase mileage standards for their fleets, and another from pharmaceutical industry figures to reverse a new rule that tightens scrutiny over the marketing of prescription drugs for unapproved uses.”

In truth, this is Corporate Anarchism, under the watchful and solicitous eye of the Trump administration. One can speak here of capitalism on a roll, or capitalism’s rape of America—your choice, or both. Here is Thomas Donohue, president of the US Chamber of Commerce: “After a relentless, regulatory onslaught that loaded unprecedented burdens on businesses and the economy, relief is finally on the way.” As the writers observe, “The regulatory retrenchment is unfolding on multiple fronts.”

And relief certainly is on the way: “Congress, with Mr. Trump’s approval, has erased three Obama-era rules in the last month, lifting regulations relating to coal mines and oil and gas exploration, as well as the sale of guns to the mentally ill.” “More than 25 additional rules” are in the pipeline, “with the House having already voted to eliminate nearly half of them.” Nor is Trump quiescent in the matter: he “has separately signed executive orders directing agencies to pursue the reversal of other rules, including a requirement that financial advisers act in the interest of their clients, and a rule aimed at protecting drinking water from pollution.”

We are, from these and other examples, staring in the face of political evil. One must confront the large changes contemplated, as in mounting a full-scale deportation affecting millions, or building the continent-wide wall to control immigration, but while looking at the big examples one must not ignore the executive and congressional pinpricks, actions in which the scalpel is cutting away more specific regulations as seen above. These latter are making their way forward to structural prominence, and by accretion, are coming to define a New Order.

It is as though the wall and deportation are diversions, so as to allow detailed movement on so many other fronts. The reporters again: “New White House appointees at agencies,” as, e.g., the FCC, SEC, Interior, and EPA, “have also personally intervened in recent weeks to block, delay or start the process to nullify other rules, such as a requirement that corporations publish tallies comparing chief executive pay with average employee wages.” Nothing is too large or too small to toss into the antiregulatory hopper.

Trump means business—literally: The administration “has also imposed a broad regulatory freeze, instructing agencies to delay the adoption of any rules not already in effect, and to consider whether those rules should be targeted for elimination.” Lipton-Applebaum continue this paradigm of Executive usurpation, in which the object is to strike regulations, but also strengthen the role and powers of the presidency within all of government: “And, through yet more executive orders [the obvious by-passing or downgrading of Congress in what remains essentially the center of gravity in the law-making process], it [the administration] has set up barriers to enact any new regulations—such as a requirement that for each new rule, at least two others must be identified for repeal—and ordered every federal agency to create a team of employees to look for more rules that can be eliminated.”

Trump turns the popular adage about the power of positive thinking on its head, negativity a reigning premise in the operation and organization of the state in its moral obligation to serve the needs of the people. The meanness and pettiness of the new Washington is not unlike what

Reagan's administration, the reporters remind us, had earlier attempted to accomplish; it "tried to rescind a rule requiring airbags in passenger vehicles."

Lastly, for the antiregulatory examples come at a faster rate, once started, than can be counted, they write: "The administration started its campaign against regulation on the afternoon of Inauguration Day, with a memo from Reince Priebus, Mr. Trump's chief of staff, instructing agencies to halt work on new regulations and to delay putting completed regulations into effect." One wonders how much Americans were and are aware of the frank make-over of the government and how far this has proceeded. We seem to have created our own Iron Curtain penning us in, as well as keeping others out. That Iron Curtain appears to be fast descending.

Government is practically brought to a standstill, from the standpoint of its transformative and ameliorative functions. There are delays as a result of the order, which includes "a measure intended to prevent potentially toxic formaldehyde exposure in homes caused by certain furniture products," becoming operable. The Trump inner circle is a menace not only to good government, but government per se: creeping, before galloping, fascism.

MARCH 13, 2017

### **The Rape of Modern America: Example, Forced Resignation of US Attorneys**

Trump has called for the forced resignation of all 46 US Attorneys for the nation as a whole, as reported by Weiser and Rashbaum, in the New York Times (3-11-17), and most notably, that of Preet Bharara, the US Attorney in Manhattan, facetiously, the Sovereign District of New York. I will not go into these and other forced resignations among those who had served under Obama, except to designate them for what they are: a political lynching, or better yet, the legitimization of arbitrary rulings under the cover of executive authority, in either case, against what democratic societies have traditionally regarded as safeguards to supremacy of the legal fabric of society. All of that is changing rapidly, an egg with the yolk sucked out, leaving only repression in its place.

Trump will have his way, no matter what, whether wholesale deportations, or, wholesale firings (the more cynical the explanations, the more crushing the defeat of the opposition—and ultimately effective the restraint of the protest. Trump has gauged America well. It bends or breaks, even to the exhibition of power. Inflexibility, in the name of patriotism and supposed class interest, allows a working class already disposed to complicity with ruling groups to seek higher esteem in the grand rankings of fascism than to make a stand, increasingly solitary in character, that obstructs the design of an integrated state formation, business and government, together with the insertion of the military factor into a dynamic system of order, hierarchy, and a polity whose irrefutable future lies with accommodation to, and subscription in, a fascistic mode of status-guarantees having ideological implications for what we have escaped thus far: the vulnerable exposure of dissent to the pressures of thought control, and—except for the prison system—the rising proportion of minorities and the poor both in and out of that system. One does not need icebergs to make a gulag.

Knowing Trump is sufficient as a ticket of admission, with a new staff at Justice now clearing the slate for the necessary candidates. Soon, anti-terrorism will no longer be sufficient in selection of a likely conviction (and for starters, natural-born citizens, although the charge, loosely cast, will go a long way to preparing the ground for illegal deportation or long-term incarceration. Once the

system of law has been attacked, there is very little society can do to prevent future violations. To know, is ample reason for suppression, widening outward to seeking what Paul Robeson might have called a stand-up-kind-of-a-guy, marked for exposure, censure, outright denunciation and perhaps extermination. America did this not long ago in Chile (some of the same enforcers of US policy no doubt involved). The contagion is widespread, and is to be expected from such a condition. Contagion—Webster's—a corrupting influence or contact, is where a compromise of the immune system already has led in capitalism to a weakening of the body politic, cancer rushing in to fill the vacuum. Its commodification has become a half-step to alienation, here, the divorcement of means and ends, treating the human being as an object rather than subject, in a world of similarly placed objects, thereby encouraging power and manipulation all the more than if the social order were organized on strict democratic lines.

Perhaps it is too late, in historical-sociological terms, for America to be organized on these lines. At least insofar as Trump is concerned, America has entered unknown territory, not only a victim of its own hubris (sans retribution), but also, a victim of its ideological rigidity in facing problems so deeply entrenched in its mentality, like striving to overcome under-consumption and the declining rate of profit, that it throws up its arms in trying for their solution. Actually, retribution becomes understandable because of this rigidity: punishment and reward alike a means of achieving psychological balance, the result the freezing into place a status quo which postpones the very solutions favorable to socialism yet inimical to the long-term interests of capitalism. America has chosen its way, as has much of the world following in its wake. One does not have to subscribe categorically to the present course to recognize its deficiencies as an alternative model of modernization. Force is morally bankrupt; so is the commodity, and with it surplus value, as the central organizing principle of society (which it is, under an unflinching view of commodity's meaning in its epistemological dimension, and not applicable to profit alone).

Trump, verily, is an agent of death, if by death one means to press forward in structural ways the signification of its own negation; it negates its opposite, life in its myriad forms tokening the affirmation of itself, its valuing of human dignity and rights in the face of the odds favorable to regimentation, consensus, acquiescence. With that, I return to the Times article noted before, Benjamin Weiser and William Rashbaum's "With Preet Bharara's Dismissal, Storied Office Loses Its Top Fighter," who "made a name for himself as one of the nation's most aggressive and outspoken prosecutors of public corruption and Wall Street crime." Bharara, like the others, was told to vacate his position, which, as of this writing, he refused to do, he alone, at least publicly, of the stalwart "46" thus refusing.

Indeed, for Bharara, this was more than holding on to a job. (He had far more to lose than to gain from taking this position, preferment given the cold shoulder in the face of supposed inadequacy, ingratitude, or disobedience.) In fact, he was working on several high-profile cases, affecting adversely Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio's record in office, as well as "Sheldon Silver, the former Democratic speaker of New York's Assembly, and Dean G. Skelos, the former Republican majority leader of the State Senate." As the last testifies, he was not partisan in his prosecution of members of both parties when the occasion warranted. That attitude combined with his established integrity and intellectual and rhetorical skills made him seemingly unfit for his post, an expected defensive strategic position in protection of his superiors. Trump was fully acquainted with his

record, and yet persisted in pushing him out, the one-case-fits-all mode of action, or policy rationale, hardly consistent with rule of law doctrine and practice.

Trump looks bad any way you slice it; the de Blasio case, now far advanced, and perhaps more promising than the others, comes at the time when the reporters acknowledge, “And with the mayor gearing up for his re-election campaign ... his lawyers are pressing prosecutors to conclude the investigation or, they say, risk affecting the election’s outcome.” Add to his potential for doing harm to the governing classes, Bharara’s stewardship, seen through a de Blasio filter, “was also known for its insider trading investigations, civil rights cases and terrorism prosecutions,” an altogether estimable record. As of Friday night, he saw himself as not severed from the appointment, and free—he told him—to pursue “the work as we have done it, independently, without fear or favor for the last seven years.” Bharara gets the last word: “[If there is a] ‘credible whiff that justice has been politicized, there’s nothing worse than that.’”

Saturday, March 11, the day after he made his stand, refusing to resign, and “to immediately clean out” his office, he announced that he was fired. There was no explanation or justification offered on the decision, simple as that. A Justice Department spokesperson stated, “I can confirm [he] is no longer the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.” The reporters further observe: “All presidents choose their own appointees” for these positions and “almost always ask those from their predecessors to leave.” But the clincher defining this story is that under Trump “the process ... was unusually abrupt, and it was yet another rocky encounter between the Trump administration and the nation’s law enforcement apparatus.” What can one say here? The more purposeful the action taken (and not returning calls to clarify policy, seemingly negative, is instead an active, cohesive, coherent policy, even if a stall technique), the more destructive the action and its consequences.

Too, remaining with the givens here, can it be said that Trump remains an enigma, or more, an adherent of conspiracy-theory strategy and thinking, when preparations were made earlier for a clean sweep of ideology and politics? I believe not. For proponents of policy, starting with a hands-on active president, hence showing determination on a local scale of operations, one singles out Bannon, etc., in what appears a mentally-binding adversarial context, confrontation would seem to follow naturally, these proponents therefore not political imbeciles or cretins. When capitalism is thought to be attacked, counter-attack is regarded as feasible and expected. The clean sweep, presumably hanging in the balance, has already taken a Rightward course, the Right a new political locus for what was once ideological Centrism. Beyond that, we must wait and see.

MARCH 17, 2017

### **America Becomes Fascist: Trump Revealed**

Trump is the real thing. His budget proposal, now made public, is perfectly expected, an increase of 10% for military spending, 7%, homeland security, 6%, veterans, and the largest cuts, -31% EPA, -29% State department and development agencies, -21% agriculture. This of course tells us little about the deformation of government allocations and still less about overall purpose. On its face, we see militarism crushing down government’s welfare functions, and this should be a clue as to what’s at stake.

As NYT reports, “The proposal would also eliminate funding [I stress, eliminate] for nearly 20 smaller independent agencies, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Legal Services Corporation, which finances legal aid groups.” The list (more below) is instructive. The reason is given to be, avoiding deficits while increasing the defense budget necessitates pruning the tree. The preeminence of defense requires nothing less, if the Homeland is to remain safe. Trump is the ultimate protector of American democracy and freedom.

At a minimum, from recent polls, 40% of the American public buys in—totally and completely, as the response to Trump’s speeches make clear, with probably another 20% on the borderline, sharing the nativist biases and xenophobic fears. This leaves a scant 40% as an opposition force (and even there, a Democratic party weak, patriotism-saturated, hardly confrontational with standards of contemporary political discourse, as on defense per se, the Cold War, toleration of dissent). In this case, predisposition to fascism, a uniform political-cultural trend since the end of World War Two, renders Trump practicable, intelligible, and for a near-majority of the public desirable. Fascism as a top-down affair cannot succeed without the underlying groundwork of receptivity.

Nevertheless, Trump has crossed the Rubicon, a recipient of history in America but also self-propelled in taking over. A healthy America never would have tolerated his advancement and acquiescence in his ideas. For they are harsh, repulsive to a democratic sensibility and belief-system, one-dimensional in the veneration of stripped-down national power combined with, and meaningless without, unrestrained capitalism, achievable by whatever means. That alone qualifies for consideration of fascism, not simply the militarist cum monopoly capital core of society, but the underlying means for achievement, the interpenetration of government and business as the polity’s defining mode.

America since 1945 has overstressed expansion, both geopolitical and market-oriented, as much co-responsible for the inception of the Cold War as the Soviet Union, and with the Korean War (which came remarkably early, 1950), its leading architect and beneficiary, so that by Vietnam, anticommunism, the operative catchword all those years, had been fully actualized as the move for unilateral dominance. This has not changed, the impulse only intensified in the interim. Perhaps instability and under-performance are integral to advanced capitalism, yet something more sinister is involved, a self-fulfilling motivation—a preservation-instinct (?)—which transcends economic ambitions and political fears, directed to a hardening personality structure contemptuous of, even frightened of—human needs and feelings. This corresponds to the requisite mindset sanctioning attitudes toward war, fortress-building, intolerance, and setting America straight on the course of global counterrevolution, none of which would be existing, possible, acceptable under an authentic expression of political-economic freedom.

I would like to look here at the proposed budget, for it indicates my thesis: beyond militarism and capitalism, but deriving from their consequent integration in today’s America, there is an eradicated disposition, absolutistic in character, to eliminate all traces of presumed softness (as defined by a growing majority, including, regrettably, the working class) from American life, that which pertains to peace, reduction of class differences thereby approaching a condition of equality, realization of respect for the individual, at bottom, an ethos of caring through meeting the health

needs, as a matter of right, of society's members, broadly interpreted beyond decent jobs and housing to the environmental well-being, protection, replenishment of the planet.

America is in the forefront of its desecration. My concern is not the big-ticket items, which are transparent to all, starting with the military, encouragement of capital accumulation, and the weakening of EPA, but the microscopic items, which are a telling guide to the settling mood of antihuman deep-seated conviction. Even the meager list thus far: why eliminate NEA or NEH unless the intuitive fear of reaching a true flourishing human identity has taken hold? I once more than a half-century ago wrote an essay for *Agricultural History* entitled "Fear of Man." Add to that "Woman," as at bottom the fear of human emancipation from the thralldom of institutionalized repression, glaringly evident in the machinery of foreign and domestic policy, and you have the picture: a vindictiveness toward anyone or anything not only threatening but also questioning the established verities, imperialism and extreme wealth-differentiation.

Let's look closer at this nihilistic (denial of any objective ground of moral truths, destruction as desirable for its own sake, definitions offered by Webster's Collegiate) mindset, as it translates into Trump's proposed budget, the hatred of human potentiality wherever humankind, and here America in particular, becomes awakened, realized, or even begins to rear its head. EPA is easy in the account: elimination of one-fifth of the agency's personnel, funding for the Clean Power Act, and climate change research. What kind of small mind tears apart what is beneficial to society, down to research? On State and development programs, we see in *The Times* chart and explanation, an attack on the UN: "Climate change initiatives ... would lose all their U.S. funding," other programs manhandled, as meanwhile "Israel's \$3.1 billion in annual military aid would be untouched."

And so on (again, NYT throughout for information). Agriculture—I stress the vicious cutting out of humanly-deserving programs, here a reduction in the National Forest System and elimination of "loan and grant programs for water and sewage systems." Next, Labor: scaling back "on a number of job training programs, including those aimed at helping seniors, disadvantaged young people and unemployed Americans." Justice: budget cutting (-\$4B), "even as he [Trump] steps up border enforcement, hires more immigration judges and slightly increases the F.B. I. budget." Here things become grizzly from any democratic standpoint, Health and Human Services: "eliminating \$4.2 billion in community service programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program," and cuts of 18% to the National Institutes of Health, in both of these cases, needing a mad Dr. Frankenstein with sharpened scalpel to ferret out such cuts.

Commerce, like the others, fares poorly: "The budget eliminates the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's grants and programs for coastal and marine management, research and education and eliminates the Minority Business and Development Agency, which supports minority-owned businesses." Education: emphasis on school-choice programs, "while eliminating funding for before- and after-school and summer programs," along with eliminating "the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant" for college students "with the greatest need for financial aid," a further instance, if one were needed, for contempt shown the poor—and designed to make them remain that way. Transportation: initiating "privatization of the nation's air traffic control operations," as well as reducing subsidies to Amtrak.

The list is long and suggests a thoroughness leaving little untouched that benefits the public, a merciless dissection on Trump's part (I use him as responsible, but much of this is scraping the



barrel of reactionary figures, in every case favorable administrators, appointed for that reason, and expected to follow in the same vein as the butchering of social welfare continues). Thus, pointedly, Housing and Urban Development: “The budget would eliminate the Community Development Block Grant Program, which funds local improvement efforts and anti-poverty programs, and cut funding for rental assistance and homeownership programs and affordable housing initiatives.” Interior, simplicity itself: “increase funding for programs that drill for oil and gas on public lands and cut funding for programs such as the National Heritage Areas and the National Wildlife Refuge Fund.”

All to increase funding for the military? Of course, but also, as the examples testify, the urge to despoil, ruin, pillage, liberate the darkness of vitriol built-up through the institutional influence and development of war, intervention, militarism, and the fragmentation of human feeling (alienation) associated with capitalism. Energy: some budget cutting, but “an increase of \$1.4 billion, or 11 percent, to the National Nuclear Security Administration, which is focused on managing the nation’s nuclear weapons arsenal.” (Hardly a peaceful pursuit.) In addition, “the budget would cut or eliminate programs to support research of breakthrough clean energy technology....” Treasury: the IRS would be “the main target,” although I should have liked more coverage to taxation and fiscal policies. Veterans Affairs: a hefty 6% increase, as in extending the Veterans Choice Program (choosing options outside V.A. facilities).

And finally, Homeland Security and Defense. The former is cut-and-dried: \$2.6B for “border security and technology, including the early stages of a wall between the United States and Mexico.” There would be a budget set aside for more Border Patrol agents and Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel. Also, “another \$1,5 billion would go toward supporting the detention and removal of illegal immigrants.” And the latter, faced with a budgetary increase of \$52.3B, The Times throws up its arms in despair of accurately enumerating, the increase being still left vague by Trump. What is not vague, however, is the drift of policy making. In every case, America is internally stripped down, impoverished of its national heritage. To say, this is all for the sake of budget balancing (the better to serve military needs) is only partially true; what we are witnessing as well is a punitive thirst, the urge to punish, even among large portions of the population struggling in present economic circumstances, and wholly in defiance of their objective class interests, i.e., punishment for being a free people.

MARCH 20, 2017

### **Two Nations: Skid Rows vs. Mar-a-Lago**

We are becoming an Inverted Republic (if still a republic), wealth concentrating upward in unprecedented proportion to the remainder of society, the downward plunge in social stratification following suit. A tale of two nations: One is comprised of hundreds of thousands of homeless; several more million individuals, ranging from those barely able to avoid homelessness, struggling below or at the poverty line, to the condition of the working poor, facing imperfect employment; until one comes to the much vaunted middle class, much of which, in truth, is just making do.

Set against this, we find the Great Contrast, a very small number of the American Elite, at 1/10 to one percent of the population, joined to a surprising extent—as witness Trump’s ability to fill out Cabinet positions—of cohesion as a bona fide ruling group. The inversion occurs because all

resources (capital accumulation, every conceivable avenue for profit maximization) are siphoned upward, leaving a political economy grounded in luxury for some, privation for many, and now a government determined to perpetuate and widen the cleavage. As is often remarked, Trump's chief supporters (aside from the very rich) are in short order going to feel the pain of his ideas, policies, actions—demonstrably aimed at creating a class-state through the sacrifice of working-people's necessities and interests.

I begin with Michael Paarlberg's article in *The Guardian* (Mar. 17), "Trump's Budget: the dream of a paranoid strongman and a vicious Scrooge." One sentence illuminates the whole picture: "Taken as a whole, Trump's [budget] proposal points to an increasingly paranoid strongman who sees budgets as tools to reward friends and punish enemies, the military as a personal ornament, and poor Americans as piggy banks for his boondoggles and vanity projects." The writer adds, "This doesn't even cover the wall, which would cost enough to pay for the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] for the next 146 years." Apropos the latter, eliminating the NEA pays for one F-35. Also, Paarlberg's first sentence needs correction, in that, for Trump, the military is more than "a personal ornament." We thus far play down or refuse to come to grips with the vast defense (?) program Trump authorizes, not as an ornament but an aggressive instrument of war, intervention, geopolitical influence, forcible marketing arrangements etc. America First and Fortress America become synonymous, integrated through military power.

I am indebted to *The Guardian* for its coverage of the US, a non-radical source with open eyes, not afraid to speak the truth. Thus, we note Alastair Gee's article, "Entire homelessness agency could be eliminated by Trump's budget cuts" (Mar. 16), in which he points out "the elimination of the U.S. Interagency Council (Usich)." Paranoia, social depravity, sadism, cruelty, all of these come into play and are revealed when one sees how far the fanaticism of the Assault on the Poor has already proceeded. Billions are being cut from the budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), "which helps provide low-income housing." The total cut to HUD would be \$6.2B from last year, or 13 per cent. Meanwhile, by the most authoritative account thus far undertaken (and it is doubtful others will follow), one night in 2016, when the study was made, 550,000 people experienced homelessness.

But let's look closer. The study, supported by the Gates Foundation, found 549,928 homeless, duly reported to Congress. Investigators, however, are in agreement that this grossly underestimates the homeless, easy to overlook, difficult to count. The strategy of not being arrested, or simply, fear of being discovered or feeling a loss of self-esteem, has created a near-invisible underclass in the shadows of civilization. Of those highly visible, and we see blocks of the homeless on sidewalks, in church aisles, in forests and open fields (in Oregon, volunteers, in 10 inches of snow, went out to make a count) , in which the homeless, many of whom must be classified as unsheltered, are in sleeping bags with cardboard boxes over their heads, leantos, abandoned cars, alleys, hardly the location of what I shall be describing momentarily. Lest we forget Usiche, which coordinates the homeless situation over several agencies, its budget, to be eliminated, was a meager \$3.5M, which shows the fanaticism in cuts of which I speak, a budget so miniscule, when we are reckoning expenditures of hundreds of billions of dollars—largely for military hardware and war-making capability—by the government.

Much can be added to the above account. Like Usich, Meals on Wheels is also tagged for elimination. Only profound cynicism and a glorious vision of world supremacy could ferret out this

miniscule item as well. And then, as reported in *The Guardian* (Mar. 18), Trump is making cuts in after-school programs: “According to After-school Alliance, 11.3 million children take care of themselves after school.” These programs provide skills, safety, recreation—until the kids are picked up by working parents. In contrast, it’s time now to observe the Other Nation, the Mar-a-Lago Club.

What follows is not my dystopian brush portraying satire and ridicule, but material taken from the Club’s official website. We are greeted: “Welcome to the Mar-a-Lago Club, one of the most highly regarded private clubs in the world. Located within 20 acres of perfectly landscaped gardens with ocean views, Mar-a-Lago is truly the crown jewel of Palm Beach and an acknowledged landmark in the National Register of Historic Places.” (This is where Trump hangs out on weekends.) The description continues: “Members enjoy all of the finest amenities that the club has to offer, from our incredible beach and pool facility, to the spa and fine dining as well as world class entertainment.” (One of the Trump hallmarks, in addition to a Billionaire Cabinet, is the flaunting of wealth, not so much in rhetoric as in conspicuous possessions and consumption. The contrast with the living conditions of the poor and homeless could not be greater—or as I believe, more intentional.)

Mar-a-Lago has been under Trump family ownership since 1985, and the Club itself since ’95. In which “he kept private quarters and all of the elegance that surrounds the property.” The Trump International Golf Club is “a five minute drive away....” (The word “elegance”—get that, you homeless!—occurs several times on the web site, a self-description of superiority, pointedly setting off the differences in power, wealth, station.) Under the heading of “Membership Opportunities,” we find this: “Membership at the club provides the highest privileges and an elite lifestyle reserved for a select few.” (Open admission and praise of a heightened plutocracy would be hard to match, yet waves of adulation bathe over Trump.)

Among the amenities is included “exclusive suites, a state-of-the-art-fitness center, award winning tennis courts, beautiful croquet lawns and an entertainment series which hosts internationally world-renowned talent.” I am warmed by this rest-and-recreation setting for tireless billionaires helping to make America Great Again. As for croquet, which caught my eye, we learn: “Boasting one of the most beautiful lawns in the country, the Mar-a-Lago Club venue will not only challenge both mind and body, but will also add a sense of serenity [along with elegance, serenity is another marker with class connotations] so seldom found in competitive sports.” America’s number one ranked player, John C. Osborn, is its head professional.

Had enough of how the upper one-tenth of one percent lives, a moral chasm indicting America—not only under Trump, but working in this direction for decades—as inviting the formation of fascism? But first we must visit the Boutique (on premises): “The Trump Boutique is nestled in an enclave of serenity [that word again, an escape from the strains of capital accumulation] amidst sheltering palm trees and the spa, salon, and fitness facilities. All products at the Boutique are hand selected with care—plush Frette bathrobes, tee shirts encrusted with Swarovski crystals, aromatic candles, the Trump Signature line of skin care & body products and much more.” He is there, holding court, as I write. Frette bathrobes, Swarovski crystals, how does one not see the depravity of massive wealth, the takeover of America by, in light of the social misery they create, economic criminals of the first water?

Finally, one gasps in viewing the Photo Gallery, Mar-a-Lago a monument to bad taste—the plushness, gilt, decorated panels, flowers, in the lobby. What I take to be the ballroom has chandeliers too numerous to count, the room bathed in wall panels and ceiling in golden splendor. The dining room is worthy of Fountainsbleu. And the spacious bedrooms have balconies overlooking the Atlantic. Alas, we bid fond farewell to a capitalist paradise. The homeless, should they care to drive by, will find the address, 1100 South Ocean Boulevard, Palm Beach, Fla., 33480. Or if they are so inclined, they can first telephone, 521.832.2600, and expect a warm, cordial welcome. I have not the words adequately to express my condemnation of the contrast, and only record that such a society of the homeless and super-rich is presumptive evidence of American fascism, not at some future date but here and now.

MARCH 24, 2017

### **Militarization of American Fascism: Trump the Usurper**

The United States is now moving from Fortress America to a Garrison State. By every conceivable measure, the Trump administration is tearing out the vitals, like an enraged tiger out for blood (for no other reason than destruction of what serves and benefits the citizenry), of a social-welfare and environmentally supportive society. The extent of the destruction is so widespread (never mind the use of a scalpel, we are also talking big time meat cleaver) that it sets the historical clock back decades on government's solemn obligation to guard the interests of the people. But, without underestimating the harm he is doing and has done, the problem is partly just that: previous governments throughout American history, the New Deal largely excepted, have not served the people's interest, and have been in the hands of ruling elites with continuities down to the present moment.

I refer to fascism advisedly. Structurally, we find the interpenetration of Capitalism and the State, or if you wish, more familiarly, business and government, the purpose to integrate parallel structures of power on behalf of profit maximization for the corporate sector at home, market-expansion and aspiration for global financial-industrial-military pre-eminence, basically through unilateral actions, abroad. Beyond structure, however, fascism, is inscribed in the American pattern of historical development since at least the late 19th century. It has meant a monoculture of capitalist saturation which has perpetuated an hierarchical social order aimed at stabilizing a ruling group, however varied over time (depending on the different sectors of the economy enjoying prominence) yet constant as part of the societal formation. Democracy, if by that we mean a central element of equality, is a farce, not even a solemn farce.

I won't attempt here a review of that history, which beginning with the Open Door Policy in the late 19th century ushered in a period of expansion having geopolitical and military significance, followed by Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism (with special nods to the House of Morgan and the Battleship Navy), then Woodrow Wilson's internationalism (both internally achieving the rationalization of banking coupled with expansion and counterrevolution), to Obama and what I would term an interventionist ethos, symbolized, for me, by the use of armed drones for purposes of assassination. All in all, America has always, in spite of periods of isolationism, been addicted to imperialism: markets, on a pragmatic basis, but also, ideological concerns for their own sake, as in support of dictators, adamant opposition to revolution, the need, as in Vietnam, mercilessly to crush

The Enemy through napalm, defoliants, and carpet bombing, and no missed opportunity for confrontation with Russia and China.

We are speaking here of the postwar world, not one of Trump's creation, which suggests that continuities exist with his predecessors, and that their taking of such faltering steps toward democratization (if at all) paved the way for his rise—harsh-sounding as that may be. America was ripe for Trump, granted in the sanitized form he presented at the election, but neither, once the picture is clear, has there been sufficient resistance to the minor qualitative leap he has made from the past: a liberalization of fascism (in which the rule of law has generally held, while, nonetheless, the concentration of wealth has rapidly moved forward, parallel to an already vastly oversized military budget and continued business-banking monopolization) to the straight-out militarization of fascism—the genuine article in countless ways, from stripping down the social safety net, to the liberation of the forces of pollution, and with that bringing of America to its knees, rounding up all the budgetary savings and channeling the funds into the military as a supreme, unquestioned good. Trump, the Prussian general, has catapulted over Weimer to become a second Adolph Hitler.

If what I say grates on the ears, I only speak to what I believe is true, namely, that he is a global menace, mobilizing the fascist sentiment that is out there (as in his Louisville speech on March 20, and, in fact, his continued mobilization of, and trying to expand, his base through going on the road to agitate crowds by spewing hate, aggression, and a charisma of caudillismo). To know Trump, regrettably, is to know a significant portion of America, and whether yesterday's polls show declining support for him, the numbers in his favor are alarming and the questions asked do not always reflect underlying attitudes, as in what purports to be anticommunism as a reflex action involving contempt for the poor and other perverted views.

Here I should like to look briefly at Coral Davenport's New York Times article, "Trump Lays Plans to Reverse Obama's Climate Change Legacy" (March 22), nominally narrow-based, the single topic, yet revealing much of the whole in microcosm. She writes that Trump "intends to follow through on his campaign vows to rip apart every element of what the president has called Mr. Obama's 'stupid' policies to address climate change." (Webster's: my reference to usurpation is, in part, to exercise authority wrongfully, especially now when the mobilization of the electorate in the campaign was grounded in his lies and its false consciousness.) Trump's proposed budget "would eliminate climate change research and prevention programs across the federal government and slash the Environmental Protection Agency's budget by 31 percent, more than any other agency." He also ordered Pruitt (who himself denies carbon dioxide has any relation to global warming), EPA administrator, "to revise the agency's stringent standards on planet-warming tailpipe pollution from vehicles"—EPA itself, then Trump meticulously reaching down to complete the devastation. Only small-minded, venomous actions, so characteristic of Nazism, helps explain the totalitarian emphasis, as though a cleansing operation.

Trump is doing everything thus far to withdraw from the Paris Accords to limit global warming, except the formal announcement, torpedoing them, first, by denying the need, and second, by pursuing a host of policies individually and collectively poisoning the atmosphere and heating the planet. But he doesn't care: humankind has no other connection with science, Nature, the environment than bleeding dry the nation and world through unrestrained capitalism and the exhibition of power. Then comes the rewriting and ultimate destruction of the Clean Power Plan, an Obama rule "devised to shut down hundreds of heavily-polluting coal-fired power plants and freeze

construction of new coal plants, while replacing them with vast wind and solar farms.” The latter, of course, is pure sissified outreach to please the weak among us, and contrary to Trump’s manly aura of belligerence and thirst for conquest, while the former, as in the Louisville rally, is a sadistic demiurge to despoil everything in sight while eulogizing, and hiding behind the image of, the miner as though the only one involved—not the mega-companies—and on public lands at that. Here Davenport notes, implying the depths of Trump’s despoliation perspective, its gratuitousness, “Economists are skeptical that a rollback of the rules would restore lost coal jobs because the demand for coal has been steadily declining for years.”

Never mind, full speed ahead, even if only for the sake of further pollution. Pruitt, as noted, does not see carbon dioxide as a driver of climate change, but that, perhaps as a test of loyalty to The Leader, is par for the course, while Mulvaney, director of OMB, in justifying Trump’s “proposed cuts to climate change research programs,” had this to say: “As to climate change, I think the president was fairly straightforward: We’re not spending money on that anymore”—neat and tidy (consistent with sharp cuts elsewhere, categorical, the edict handed down, fascistic in spirit and execution). One can see what I mean by sabotaging the Paris Accords. And AG Sessions, by the draft order on eliminating the Clean Power Plan, has requested that “a federal court halt consideration of a 28-state lawsuit against [Trump’s] regulation.” This is typical of Trump’s mounting a full-court press to devastate the opposition and have his own way (my previous reference to “lift[ing] a moratorium on new coal leases on public lands.”

Trump wants the elimination, getting down to the nitty-gritty, of the “budgeting metric known as the social cost of carbon,” which “places a dollar cost on the economic impact of planet-warming carbon dioxide pollution ... costs [which] would be outweighed by the economic benefits of preventing billions of tons of planet-warming pollution.” His order, as well, would rescind Obama’s, “that all federal agencies take climate change into account when considering any form of environmental permitting.” To move from the above discussion, easily extended to cover other sectors of America’s economy and society (eliminating Meals on Wheels, a small detail, sticks out for me of the obvious social cruelty motivating policy), to the militarization of American fascism is puddle-jumping, not a major leap, for the same mindset prevails, an orderly dystopian nightmare founded on base instincts of power, wealth, and status (to which I would add, cruelty for its own sake, and the desire to denigrate and humiliate those who oppose or disagree).

Fascism, here, business-government interpenetration, sharpens and articulates the instinct and glorification of violence within and reinforced by a framework of lethal force applied in furtherance of mutual Capitalism-State objectives. This short-circuits democratic processes and thereby enhances the power of The Leader, in this case, Trump, who is at home in both worlds, Capitalism and the State. I grant the definition is sophomoric, but it says what I want to call attention to, the unwarranted seizure of power (even, at the time, accomplished through election, the power now turned to monstrous ends). Webster’s definition for militarism, “exaltation of military virtues and ideals,” also “a policy of aggressive military preparedness,” both of which fit the Trump administration exactly, carries over directly from a parochial world view which corresponds to the hierarchy, falsification of purpose, essential atavism found in the domestic sphere, as a unitary projection made applicable to both the home-front and abroad.

The dwarfing of all else to the military budget speaks volumes about the true purposes of American society as presently (and it seems for perhaps an eternity to come) organized. The

integration of domestic and foreign policy that occurs in Trump's warped mind involves the negative linkage between the two spheres: when he knifes domestic programs and agencies he does so for the express purpose of engineering a military build-up. The obverse (principal surface) of every domestic move is a step toward greater militarism—and a possible step toward war. Similarly, every militaristic influence in society redounds back on domestic attitudes favoring, hierarchy, privilege, superiority, exemption from constraints, and valuing obedience down the social structure to ensure acquiescence and promote false consciousness. In one respect, we can admire Trump's frankness, for instead of taking the Democratic line of guns and butter, to indicate that both can be operable, he straight-out makes the proposition, guns vs. butter, where the nation cannot have both, and the latter necessarily must defer to the former in social value and importance. And as for obedience, it logically and practically goes along with hierarchy.

Finally, I'd like to examine NYT's major study, "Is America's Military Big Enough?," coauthored by Rebecca Lai, Troy Griggs, Max Fisher, and Audrey Carlsen (March 22), which provides at the top an overview of "major elements of the U.S. military." We find 3,476 tactical aircraft, 760 attack helicopters, 93 cruisers, destroyers, and frigates, 10 aircraft carriers, 2, 831 tanks, 450 ICBM launchers, 157 bombers, and I'm sure the list can be expanded. More than enough, with the modernization of the nuclear arsenal, to make the remainder of the world take notice. The utter insanity here is, unlike increases in the past (Trump as we are tired of hearing, but do little about, "has proposed a \$54 billion increase in defense spending,") where specific allocations had a defined purpose, the reporters state, as though military increases are for the sake of intimidation at home and abroad, "Mr. Trump has not articulated a new mission that would require a military spending increase. This has left analysts wondering what goals he has in mind."

Stop wondering, the goals are multipronged but center on using the threat of aggression to make America Strong Again. Trump knowingly plays with fire, as though conflict were a test of manhood (or confirmation of nihilism). US military spending totals \$596B, exceeding that of the next seven countries combined. That buys a lot: 1.3 M active-duty troops, 865,000 in reserve; 200,000 active troops deployed in over 170 countries; an 11 percent increase in active duty army and marine corps personnel; "around 2,200 fighter jets," with an additional "100 more fighter aircraft to the Air Force; as for fifth generation fighter aircraft, the US is alone in that department (the F-35 is in that classification, slated to receive \$400B in expenditures); two new aircraft carriers ("more than half of the world's 18 active aircraft carriers are in the United States Navy;" and on nuclear weapons, Trump told Mika Brzezinski, "let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all." The salience of the buildup, as the reporters are aware, is that, "as with other spending plans, he [Trump] has not articulated a strategic goal." Probably that is expected, because the purpose is the terrorization of the world to suit America's ambitions.

MARCH 28, 2017

### **Political Cannibalism: Eating America's Vitals**

In a nation that professes to be democratic, the United States, we see, as I write, violations of a fundamental nature. They constitute the substructure, perhaps not yet the Constitutional-legal basis, although certainly the moral basis, for introducing the charge of impeachment directed to Donald Trump. Am I too premature? I have the following charges in mind, in no particular order because

they in fact hang together and make for a cohesive whole—conditions and practices which promise to become worse as Trump becomes more emboldened in his actions and encounters less resistance.

Let us start with his framework of government, hierarchical in structural-ideological terms, in which wealth concentration is an acknowledged purpose (telegraphed by the demand for “tax reform” and the appointment of a Billionaire Cabinet). This is not a “people’s government,” which, with the possible exception of the New Deal, has not been the case anyway, and hence, is not an impeachable offense. But at least it could be shouted from the rooftop every moment until the din awakened people to the total inversion of the meaning of democracy. Equality is not enshrined in the Constitution, yet its absence specifically as the result and intent of the society’s functioning should expose the administration to strong criticism as creating still further than the Democrats a class-state (or in fact, a militarized plutocracy).

From structural-ideological hierarchy it is an easy step, and logically related, to militarism, a system built upon command, discipline, issuing and taking orders, amoral standards (which legitimate and justify killing, torture, regime change) all in the name of patriotism. Militarism also refers to the militarization of social values and national identity, which leads to an unmistakable Trump marker: ethnocentrism and xenophobia to be ground into basic policy making and the increasing likelihood of war, Russia or China as which possible candidate not yet determined. Militarism, as itself such an integral factor in fascism, has not begun to exhaust its meaning, for it affects the whole purpose and processes of government. Militarism is meant to bleed the social sector dry, a perfect excuse for destroying the safety net, an avowed purpose of Trump’s candidacy and presidency. The military state ideally repudiates government’s social obligations to its people. Even without authentic democracy in its history, America did not have a moral emptiness at its center.

Now it does. We see this in the proposed budget cuts so as to give more to the military. If still not a violation of the Constitution (except perhaps to a broad interpretation of the general welfare), it will do on the antecedent plane to substantive political discussion in the hope of stimulating greater awareness of the massive disconnect between government and people. Political consciousness is centrally important, and everything now attempted and given priority seeks to break this down, indeed, convert it into a false consciousness closely attached to elite rule, global expansion, and an ethos of follow The Leader. Cut, cut, cut, bring the citizenry to its knees, and expel all others. Maternity care, addiction treatment, the list proceeds as though culled with a sharpened needle, every right-wing hatred brought to the surface. And yet, Trump retains much of his following (notwithstanding recent polls, which themselves imply criticism more than outright disaffection), as though a core constituency is ripe for fascism, if not already there. Trump’s chief adviser, Bannon, a Hitler-figure laying in waiting, is reputed to have through his organization, contacts, and proselytizing, some 26M captive loyal adherents.

Shifting public allocations to the military sphere, coupled with tax cuts calculated to benefit only the wealthy, not only eliminates essential government services, but also serves as a means to redistribute wealth, power, and status—more than already under the Bushes, Clinton, and Obama—to the upper stratum. A Billionaire Cabinet, few with any experience in public service, and each dedicated to destroying the designated sector (the reason for the appointment), again may not be an indictable offense, but loudly proclaims the need for impeachment proceedings, centered, like anarchism, on the deliberate wreckage of government and ruination of the social order. Militarism,



cause and consequence of needless human suffering largely for its own sake, is an economic and ideological pretext, beyond working for the overwhelming superiority of weaponry and fighting strength, for achieving the docility and psychological impoverishment of American working people.

Then there is the wall, seemingly a nationalist-isolationist drawing inward, which transmogrifies with its vilification of the immigrant the historical image and reputation of America, while thus hiding behind a Fortress-America ideology, actually pressing for greater intervention in world affairs. Impeachment is here improbable, except for the way the Executive leaves little room for congressional action, not to say, for Trump, a record of unscrupulousness which could lead to intervention and undeclared war. In the examples given, and that omits so much else, what is frightening is the lack of opposition or resistance offered to a one-sided, devious government that disregards elemental principles of the rule of law, civil liberties, uncontested civilian over military authority, and the adoption by society of a sovereign people expressing their will—and that includes their representatives—free from pressures and manipulation. America has become the creature of its upper groups, themselves led by an infinitesimal proportion at the top of the pyramid.

Where will it end? Trump on mental grounds alone should never have become president. He is not to be trusted in moments of crisis, particularly those of his own creation. His arrogance is boundless, which often means the cover-up for personal emptiness or a sense of inferiority. His toughness has no redeeming features, the hard-nosed deal maker a vain person who lives for winning and somewhat crumbles when he doesn't. Play with my marbles, or not at all. His business interests violate the emoluments clause of the Constitution, prohibiting a president from receiving gifts or benefits from a foreign government (a Chinese bank is the biggest tenant at Trump Tower), but although technically a ground, it does not carry the necessary weight for impeachment. Rather, Trump to this point, habitual prevarication and activating a volatile mass in his speaking engagements notwithstanding, stays within constitutional bounds, so that until his true policies and inclinations can be smoked out, which would raise extreme danger for the world at large, hope lies in a militant Democratic party challenging him at every turn (backed by the small "d" democratic crowd on the street and in strikes).

On both counts, the results so far have been disappointing. Nothing can be expected of the Democrats, their latest ploy being to show antagonism to Russia, ideologically, for its own sake, but politically to demonstrate their respectability and patriotism. The party is wholly unworthy of leading America or standing up to fascism. A war or complete severing of ties with Russia on the part of the Trump administration would meet with its approval and exhibit its complicity in mounting a conflict. As for the working class, it in turn, hopefully, with pockets of opposition, has gone over to the side of Reaction, a force for intervention, largely self-marginalized in the fight for social-welfare measures. The early days of the CIO are far over the horizon, the IWW even more so. Deny it if we must, in honor of a democratic vision of America and its potential, but the American worker has ceased to act as a progressive social force, a gauntlet picked up by ordinary people fearing the loss of medical coverage, a public school system, control over pollution, hence, the vast depletion of society's resources now to go instead to the making of war.

Trump is a tyrant, worse, an unthinking one, tied up in his own personal world of glorification, his luxurious lifestyle of weekend golfing, his surrounding himself in the trappings of power, all that makes for a repugnant personality who delights in popular adulation and the ostentatious display of wealth. Mar-a-Lago is the man writ large, comfortable with like-minded individuals who

despise the masses, would if they could liquidate the poor (except insofar as needed for serving them), and contributing to every cause prejudicial to humankind. Will the republic survive as we once knew it or at least imagined its possibilities to be?

APRIL 3, 2017

### **The Filth of Lucre: Trump's Presidency**

The American people should rise in condemnation, scorn, ridicule, at what has happened to its government and leadership. Super-wealth has become a political factor in guiding and planning policy, carrying a vision of destruction to the pillars of a democratic society in fulfillment of class interests and selfish contempt for the needs of others. America has never witnessed barbarism of such proportions before, a single-minded obsession with riches, which has been translated into power in a self-enclosed process of capital accumulation via the nymphomaniacal pursuit of opportunity, profit, possessiveness.

Webster's Ninth Collegiate defines filth as, among other things, moral corruption or defilement, and lucre, as monetary gain, a far better moral indictment of Trump's transmogrification of the commonweal than anything offered thus far by the Democrats and the millions of Americans who elected and still praise him. Godliness and riches form an organic bond. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, said it best: "I think one of the really interesting things that people are going to see today—and I think it is something that should be celebrated—is that the president has brought a lot of people into this administration, and this White House in particular, who have been very blessed and very successful." It is blessed (Webster's, to hallow or consecrate by religious rite or word; to invoke divine care for) to be successful, conversely, successful to be blessed—a Trumpian self-righteous bowdlerization of humanistic ethics, not to say that of religious values and social teachings.

There is no mathematical algorithm (unfortunately) for judging wealth excessive and injurious to society under a rampant capitalist order (one reason socialism and democratization still tug at the heartstrings of many people in the world), but surely America has set an example of pure evil, much of which had remained undetected until the advent of Trump's presidency, for the individuals involved well after the head-start made. Trump had himself, family, associates, even those known only by reputation, ready-to-hand, to assemble a billionaire's circle to run the government and society. Plutocracy doesn't do it, not strong enough a term: government by the wealthy, a controlling class of the wealthy. We enter, instead, the realm of ECONOMIC FASCISM. Worse still is the ignorance and smugness, generically and literally, the desire to get away with murder, convinced they will never be prosecuted or suffer humiliation.

Economic fascism requires political fascism for its implementation, a structural negation of what governments are expected to do, preserve the transparency of government, ensure the fairness of the legal order, respect the principle of equality in all matters affecting the public—the foregoing merely a bare minimum of the bourgeois state and society, and not even raising the standard of socialism. In fact, long-antedating Trump, and as practiced by both major parties, proto-fascistic tendencies have been long in the making, internationally, evidenced by war, intervention, efforts at regime change, confrontation with Russia, China, and Third World socialism, and contemptuous treatment of climate-change dangers, and domestically, a long list in desecration and denigration of

all things placing the needs of the public before and above the needs of capitalism. I include here violations of the right of privacy, a more-than-adequate system of medical care, the safeguarding of the environment, and the allocation of the nation's resources and wealth to improvement of people's well-being, rather than to a military machine insatiable in its demands and, not happenstance, soaking up the social surplus so as to prevent its being plowed back into the needs of society, especially that of the poor, the unemployed, the growing number of homeless.

That is fascism enough, or its excellent starting place, and now, Trump's systemic escalation adds fuel to the fire of suffering while establishing the basis—itsself also long in the making—of economic fascism, a floodgate of vested interests both on their own and taking command of government, appointees who are specialists in tearing down the regulations provided by the agencies and departments they administer: carte blanche for still greater capital accumulation and the spoliation of what they despise, as in the case of the coal industry and climate change. Economic fascism speaks here not simply to the organization of industrial and other fronts, as under Nazism, but, antitrust a dead letter in any case, particularly the financial sector, but the active dismantlement of government itself in its regulatory capacity. The State and Capitalism become one for purposes of mutual support and fending off opposition, a business polity or commonwealth all else of secondary concern. And now, the billionaires are coming out of the woodwork.

The New York Times (April 1), based on material released the night before, self-reported wealth of officeholders (the president apparently exempted) which I surmise has been consistently under-reported, and had the care and scrutiny of teams of topflight lawyers and accountants, reveals a picture disturbing enough as it stands. The reporters, Jesse Drucker, Eric Lipton, and Maggie Haberman, writing, “Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner [Trump's daughter and son-in-law, both now officially part of the administration] Still Benefiting From Business Empire, Filings Show,” begin by observing, the couple “will remain the beneficiaries of a sprawling real estate and investment business still worth as much as \$740 million, despite their new government responsibilities,” and this fails to include Ivanka Trump's other holdings, well in the millions, a stake in a hotel in Washington near the White House, fashion lines, etc. Divesture for them and the some 180 senior officials in the administration whose assets were reported (already in sheer numbers presumptive evidence of a plutocracy), is problematic and often shrouded in mystery.

Gary Cohn, former president of Goldman Sachs, and now head of the National Economic Council, has “assets valued between \$253 million and \$611 million [the enormous spread here is illustrative of the examples cited, which argues that self-reporting of assets is not to be trusted, being even greater than cited], and income last year as high as \$77 million.” Kellyanne Conway, the pollster and counsel to Trump, “earned at least \$842, 614 last year, and perhaps slightly more, the filings show. Her assets are valued at between \$11 million and at least \$44.2 million.” (Again, the obvious spread.) Her husband has taken an appointment with the administration. And then there is Stephen Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, who has more going for him financially in right-wing circles especially than I can enumerate, including support from Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah, for his holdings in Breitbart News Network, Cambridge Analytica, and the Government Accountability Institute, all paying Bannon handsomely in salaries and consulting fees. His Bannon Strategic Advisers Inc. “was valued at between \$5 million and \$25 million.”

As one goes further, one sees a similar picture, names unknown to the general public, for example, “Reed Cordish, who heads up technology initiatives, accumulated assets as a Maryland

developer valued as high as \$424 million,” or Christopher Liddell, presidential assistant and director of strategic initiatives, who “had been the chief financial officer of companies including Microsoft, International Paper and General Motors before taking his White House job.” Liddell owned stock in GM, “among more than 750 other companies.” Thus, the dramatis personae of the Trump administration: it is not my purpose to incite to class riots, but surely this is a picture offensive to everything America claims to stand for, a society beneficent, habitable to ordinary people, a land of freedom and social justice. How explain the grossest maldistribution of wealth in American history, and, to my way of thinking, acquiescence to this on the part of large numbers of Americans and a Leader in command of the nuclear arsenal while conducting worldwide exercises in counterrevolution?

I am no longer young, or for that matter, well, but our fights a half-century and more ago for civil rights, peace, disarmament, international understanding, took place in a very different America, where protest, demonstrations, opposition, was expressed and openly honored by many, even in the political community, and where one felt causes were worth fighting for, joined by like-minded individuals. I cannot say as much today, an electorate that brought Trump into office, that watches as the most innocuous reforms, like Meals on Wheels, are being scrapped, a nation too satiated with false consciousness to be shocked any longer by what is happening. Perhaps Vietnam previewed the decline of the American spirit, yet the mindset has grown far worse since then, epitomized by a Trump, his loyal followers, an indifferent America, none appreciating what that mindset is leading to, or silently applauding because democracy is too difficult a strain to live up to or bear, a fascistization of structure, politics, culture, leaving little room for rebirth as a society dedicated to human freedom for all its people.

APRIL 7, 2017

### **Mr. Xi's Visit: An imaginary Speech**

After a most informative discussion on world affairs, I return to China happy in the knowledge that President Trump is what I expected and hoped, a strong leader who will do what we all salute him for, making America great again. The world looks to America for principles of self-reliance (your beloved Emerson) and what we once termed economic nationalism, but which runs deeper, a genuine patriotism of country affirming United States' grand destiny of taking care of its people and keeping the Nation strong. One could not ask for anything better in true political leadership.

Accordingly, in praise of America's and the President's vision, we in China want to further the purposes of that vision as our small contribution to the Land of Freedom, this by carrying out President Trump's often-expressed wish for nation-building at home and independence from the strains and tensions of global involvement.

Mr. President, we will do everything we can to assist you in carrying out your agenda, notably, strengthening America's moral fiber by putting its resources and initiative to work at home. Nothing must undermine the resolve—such as dependence on others—of the American people.

First, to support the spirit of welcoming challenge, I am instructing my government to withdraw all investment from the United States within thirty days (including loans to Jared Kushner); to eliminate all US economic activities, investments, banking-commercial-manufacturing presence in

China, also within thirty days; and, as for the yearly trade deficit America has run up of \$300B to request immediate payment and the cancellation of all future loans. A genuine friend could not do better, in encouraging America's economic independence.

Second, to ensure America's free hand in realizing its potential, I am instructing our Foreign Ministry to negotiate closer relations with Russia, in a common policy of keeping American goods out of our two countries—not a higher tariff, but again absolute exclusion. No friend of America's rebuilding effort could do less, and in that way honor Mr. Trump's election pledge of achieving self-sufficiency. To that end, I am asking Russia to use its good offices to encourage the European Union likewise to exclude an American presence, while China will work to the same end in Asia, and both Russia and China—again from the desire to see America succeed—follow the same course in the whole of Africa and Latin America. In this way, President Trump can realize his dream of a Fortress America beholden to no-one but itself.

Third, with much of the world rejoicing in America's enjoyment of its power to prosper on its own, especially in allocating its wealth to military and/or nuclear modernization ends, I am instructing China, and asking Russia to do the same, to target principal US population areas as a reminder of peaceful intent, likewise in furtherance of its self-sufficiency, to ask international organizations (e.g., WTO, WHO) to expel the United States from membership, as a favor to Mr. Trump, because simply a diversion from the work to be done at home. As with everything else, he will thank us for our friendship in facilitating his paradigm of excellence.

I have more thoughts about showing our respect and admiration for America, but these three are for starters. America deserves to achieve its fondest ambitions, to win the world's respect by fulfilling its destiny of carrying capitalism to its finest hour: an autarkic fascism surrounded by the wall with Mexico on one side and a northern border, yet to be determined, but armed lest, out of envy, the wrong sort flock in to take advantage of the folk. Not everyone is in full-dress preparatory mode to construct a fascist commonwealth; the world watches breathlessly to see if America can pull it off. Thus far, if billionaires are an index of societal health, America is off to a good start, more so, in this important respect, because it will not allow the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, to gum up the works. If push comes to shove—and the purpose is praiseworthy beyond dispute—the inferior classes, under the heading of infrastructure, can build crematoria, concentration camps, whatever it takes to keep the American Dream pure and unsullied.

APRIL 12, 2017

### **Anniversary of FDR's Death: "The Only Thing We Have to Fear is Fear Itself"**

It is nearly impossible to speak truth to power when the present occupant of the White House (and his predecessors going back at least through Reagan) is already obsessed with expanding power and wouldn't know truth if it hit him between the eyes. Truth is falsified at its inception when power takes on absolutist proportions and pursued in its own right. Cynicism, hegemony, mere acquisition, are notable examples defining a unified core of meaning and understanding, not just characterizing Trump, along with a fascination with domination and cruelty, but also his supporters and, if we were being frank, the majority of Americans, Democrats included.

In an unrelieved political-ideological landscape of haute-capitalist authority and values, the New Deal stands out in American history as the exceptional fragment of a contrived, artificial Exceptionalism (the national mythology) penetrating the epistemological foundations of the society. That bad? Worse still: a quasi-fascist State, in which FDR and the New Deal become a democratic moment of struggle against the forces of wealth, status, vast resources of capitalist accumulation, in Webster's, control, authority, and influence over others. Interpenetration, the mutuality of interest between business and government, capitalism and the State, defines the course—lines of development—of present, and no doubt future, American nation-building. The contrast with the New Deal could not be more striking, even though the earlier political-social formation was not socialist, and signified the potential malleability of capitalism itself (capable of being altered or shaped by outside forces or influences, in this case, government, adapted to democratic ends).

April 12th, FDR's martyrdom is far more consequential and inspiring than that of JFK, if one has in mind, in foreign policy, rallying the people to antifascism rather than counterrevolution, and, domestically, building the political economy around the elevation of the poor and unemployed, rather than a corporatist structure of wealth concentration (as occurred from Kennedy onward through Trump), fragmentation of workers' identity and organization, and now, a direct assault on the concept of welfare and the social safety net. Trump, again, his government, the people who support him, America increasingly in general, avowedly seek the destruction of a people-centered present and future in favor of a highly-structured class system of privilege, elitism, and—perhaps one of the greatest differences with the New Deal—a permeating militarism and spirit of global domination. Can one nation, in the breadth of one lifetime, mark such a gross turnaround in purpose and execution?

Let's turn to FDR's First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933, passionate, memorable, colorful, yet also sharply denotative in thought and language, above all, confident, the start of a great romance between the president and the American people—the opening:

I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our Nation impels. [Compare this with Trump's government by Twitter and tweet.] This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. [It is useful to recall just how severe and desperate were conditions at the time, FDR not sweeping under the rug the extent of unemployment and depression, nor creating diversions in foreign-policy adventurism to draw attention away from ineffectual government policies at home.] So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

[This is the start of the First Hundred Days, a time for rebuilding and extending the power and influence of government to meet the challenges of the future, as contrasted with Trump, at eighty-nine days, as I write, focused on the emasculation and destruction of government—in large part a test of their respective views on the intelligence and perspective of the people. FDR continues]: “In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am confident that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.”

There are many more noteworthy passages from his speeches, writings, press conferences, etc., worth remarking, from “one-third of a Nation....” to “horse-and-buggy days,” to a restatement of the Four Freedoms, on and on into the night, but surely my point is grasped, an effort, in a time of crisis, for the political leadership to address the pain for the individual from the cancer itself, in my case, to a full-court press on achieving societal reconstruction so that through a better health-care system, wellness in all its manifestations will spread its blessings, translated into quality and longevity of life, throughout the social order. That order, be it noted, is an integrated political matrix covering all bases pertinent to and contributing to life as responsive to human needs.

APRIL 17, 2017

### **The Nazification of Sexuality: Confessions of a Bigot**

How far does one publicly dare to question contemporary shibboleths of liberalism/radicalism (my own preference is to distinguish the two; I view liberalism as antiradicalism, a moderate version of corporate capitalism, and hence, not one of my favorites)? More particularly, how open are publications and views with bono vide radical credentials to criticism of, for example, homosexuality and transgenderism? Yes, we all believe in toleration, profess a commitment to open advocacy, provided they fall within the parameters of human rights, which homosexuality and transgenderism certainly do. I am not calling for censure, public hangings, or even gentle criticism—only for a little perspective. Privacy, I believe, is a sacred right. No argument there. Yet, as an old radical (84 next month), with extensive background in practically all areas of radicalism (exception: sexual politics) over a lifetime, and with a diagnosis of terminal cancer staring over me, I feel I am free to speak my mind.

Whether others will want to listen, or grant me that privilege (especially when it goes against conventional radical wisdom), is another matter. This is not engagement in hate-politics, nor, hopefully, an expression of senility, but reflections on how I see as taking one’s eyes off the ball (i.e., a failure to prioritize structural-psychological issues in the face of world realities). To show concern for the liberation of sexual impulses, lifestyles, etc., when the power structure of the United States is moving ever-closer to fascism, is to me (a) a luxury of self-indulgence or of gratification, (b) a societal blindness to issues that affect, as I believe, more fundamental forms of human dignity (notably, the distribution of wealth and power in society, income inequality, enforcement of juridical concepts and provisions of equality before the law and as addressed by local, state, and federal police powers, and (c) a diversion from fighting against the real enemies of human freedom, capitalism, corporatism, fascism, lack of transparent government, perhaps most important right now, militarism, foreign intervention, regime change.

America just dropped on Afghanistan the largest non-nuclear bomb in global history. After the first day, a few references in the press and public discussion, and after that nada, as business as usual is resumed in full splendor—more threats, confrontations, possible interventions. Today, as self-indulgence, societal blindness, diversion, make the news, one feels that the radical vision of societal betterment is vanishing, lost from sight, as though sexuality trumps homelessness, malnutrition, gut-wrenching impoverishment, wars and their preparation, a military budget that sucks the lifeblood from the social-welfare sector, in a word, America as it presently exists, and as it has under bipartisan leadership since the close of World War II.

“Prioritize,” a cold, emotionless word, and yet, it follows disturbingly when it is set against a sexual politics that can only have validity when far more basic problems are first resolved. I know this contradicts prevailing radical opinion, which either looks askance at traditional factors of concern, or else puts sexuality on the same plane as the others as testimony to human rights. What good will the toleration, and for those immediately concerned, the practice of, homosexuality, be if the human race faces annihilation, or if in everyday living people are unemployed, undereducated, some dying prematurely because pollution standards are unenforced or not sufficiently rigorous, or dying prematurely because the pharmaceutical makers and medical profession get away with highway robbery? Much needs to be done, indeed, the whole reconstruction of society (whether or not socialism is the sole legitimate answer?) has to be created, away from war, hegemony, privation, environmental degradation, before rolling up our sleeves and confronting head-on issues of personal liberty.

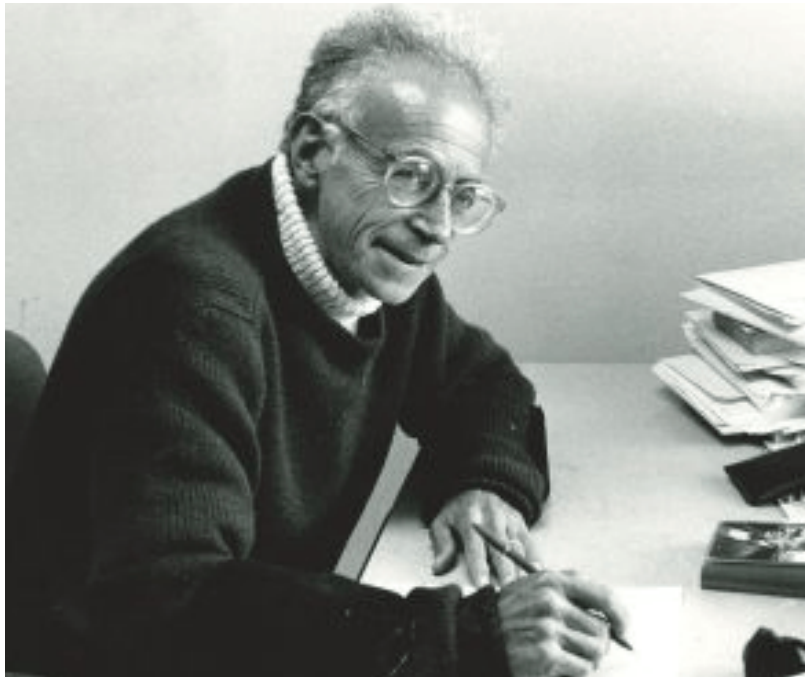
I’d want very much to see dignity and complete rights freed from ideological stigma accorded to every human being, which obviously must include sexual identity. All of our brothers and sisters have a right to enjoy the sunshine, neither fearing discrimination and ridicule nor the diminution of self-worth because of societal prejudice. So what does this come down to? Build a better society, the democratization of power, but don’t ignore what is before us, which, doing, becomes complicity in a horrid status quo, filled by billionaires taking over government and capitalism becoming identical with the State. As precious as personal liberty is, it does not have to be flagrantly displayed when, e.g., race as a social determinant of condition still obtains or economic standing shapes one’s possibilities for happiness. Enjoy one’s own humanity and that of those one loves, without forcing to the front, and therefore giving conspicuous attention to, what for the moment demands equal or greater notice, than the solution to, yes, specifically economic-political problems crowded out of our field of vision. Don’t trivialize radicalism, which itself, historically and morally, seeks the health, well-being, and pride of every human being, but at the same time, affirm the significance of social structure and ideology in ensuring the fruition of human dignity as an unconditional birthright for all.



JUNE 16, 2017

**Farewell Norman Pollack, 1933-2017**

by JOSHUA FRANK



This past week we lost one of our most tenacious, prolific voices. Norman Pollack, after a long, arduous battle with cancer, passed away on June 11 at his home in Michigan with his wife Nancy by his side. He was 84.

Norman's legacy stands tall, from his days in the civil rights movement to his tenure at Yale and Michigan State University, he never stopped fighting for social justice. He was not only an author and well-respected scholar, he was also a loving father, husband and a genuine friend of CounterPunch. I will greatly miss our frequent email exchanges that ranged from theater outings with his wife Nancy to his daily battles through multiple rounds of chemotherapy. I never experienced Norman as a professor, but I imagine he would have been dynamic, yet challenging. He often spoke fondly of his former students, especially those who carried on the torch of an activist life.

While Norman's politics were complex, they were also clear-cut. He believed in real left-wing populism, writing several books on the topic over the years. He advocated for building opposition from the ground-up, at all costs. Most importantly, he remained steadfast in his belief that the working class has the spirit to engineer a genuine progressive transformation of society. And if this didn't transpire, he argued, the US would fall into a fascist spiral, indeed he believed we were already on that treacherous course.

Norman was an outspoken, radical Jew who defended the rights of Palestinians and other indigenous peoples. He was a fierce critic of the Bush and Obama administrations, especially extraordinary rendition, drone warfare and US policy in the Middle East, yet he left plenty in his cannon to blast the spectacle of Donald Trump.

Marxists in academia are few and far between these days, and Norman was perhaps the last of his generation. He openly credited his pal Gabriel Kolko as a prime influencer on his political

thinking, and like Kolko, Pollack's writings will continue to impact our political discourse for decades to come. I recall Norman telling me how much he missed Kolko when he died, and I can say the same of Pollack now. He'll be deeply missed.

I return often to Pollack's words, especially his condemnation of Israel's domination of Palestinians. Few have written on the issue with more passion and contempt. Here's a snippet from an essay he wrote for us in 2015 titled *Israel's Defamation of Judaism: The Rape of the Palestinian People*:

"The bombardment of Gaza last summer, a replay of Guernica as a lengthier exercise in domination, artillery replacing the dive bomber, was merely an example of the stored-up hatred and contempt Israelis displayed toward the Palestinians, a twisted mindset crossing the line from punitiveness to outright psychosis as though squashing an ant hill. Israelis do not concede the humanity of their victims, and perhaps do not even see them as victims but mere objects to be pushed around and, as a useful object lesson to them, swept aside, their houses bulldozed, their land taken away, the science of humiliation raised to a fine art."

May we all stay as vigilant as Norman, who, right up to his final days, while he struggled through hospice care, worked alongside Nancy to finalize his forthcoming book *Capitalism, Hegemony and Violence in the Age of Drones*, which is currently being prepared for publication.

Farewell, Norman. We'll do our best to keep the fight alive. Your spirit will forever live on.